

(Revised) Remarks on the Occasion of Erich Lehmann's
Memorial Service

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I want to start by thanking Erich's family for allowing me to speak during this memorable occasion in which we celebrate Erich's life. It is truly an honor for me to be here.

I had a difficult time deciding on what to share with you today, not because I did not have things to say. Rather, because there are too many wonderful memories to choose from. I could have chosen to talk about Erich Lehmann the scholar. Instead, I chose to share with you today some of my personal experiences with Erich. Erich's qualities as a person, mentor, and friend, are too many to share here today. I have selected a few that illustrate Erich's - Professor Lehmann as my wife always called him - superb human qualities. I will restrict my remarks to four aspects of Erich's personality.

I will start with Erich's strong sense of duty. At around 1991, I invited Julie and Erich to visit us in El Paso. As part of the visit, Julie and Erich would meet with the Dean of the College of Science. Back then, it was still possible to go up to the gate and wait for the passengers to deplane. As Julie and Erich deplaned, I noticed that Erich was walking very slowly and he was obviously in a lot of pain. I asked him what was wrong. He said he had pain since that morning. I told him that he could have canceled and everyone would have understood, to which he responded "Well, we are already here". Fortunately for everyone, the next day Erich was already feeling much better and he quipped "Julie, I feel so good that I may even take off my sweater today". The rest of the visit went wonderfully.

Another example was his insistence on presenting a talk in each of the Lehmann Symposia. He would call me and say, "Javier, I don't know if I can go because I do not yet have something to talk about". I would remind him that he was the guest of honor and hence he did not have to present, but he would respond "Oh, but I cannot do that! If I attend I have to present".

In spite of being the guests of honor, Julie and Erich attended every single invited and plenary session, sitting in the front row.

The second collection of qualities I admired in Erich was his sensitivity to others; his caring for others. I said earlier that my wife always addressed Erich as “Professor Lehmann”. I used to do the same, but things changed. During the 1983 departmental Christmas party, I presented Erich with the title page of the dissertation for his signature. As he was signing, he told me: “Javier, you know, now comes the most difficult part”. I thought, oh no! What now?! He said, “You are no longer my student. We are now colleagues. So from now on I don’t want to hear this Professor Lehmann stuff. From now on, you call me Erich”. This was easier said than done. It took me 5 years to finally start addressing him as Erich.

Throughout my years as a graduate student, Erich would, every time he saw me, ask me about my family. He would say: “Javier, how is Maria and the children?”; “Are you coming to the Department picnic?” And I would ask myself, “Why is he so nice to me?” Maybe he has mellowed out after the years, I thought. A few years later, for his 75th birthday, I collected reminiscences from most of his students about their interactions with Erich. To my great surprise, Erich had not mellowed out. That was the way Erich had been all along. All the students’ stories confirmed it. Knowing this, of course, created some mixed feelings for me, as I had liked the idea that somehow he was being nice only to me. Alas, he was nice to everyone!

On another occasion, I was still a graduate student already working on the dissertation, I had to have eye surgery. I asked Ma Luisa, my wife, to call Professor Lehmann and explain why I could not meet with him that day. The next time we met he said “Javier, you know that advisors are also for providing guidance with medical problems. I have some physician friends at UCSF that I could have recommended”.

After graduating, I returned to Berkeley for short summer visits. On one occasion, I mentioned to Erich that my son has started to learn to play the viola. The day prior to my return to El Paso, Erich and I went to a music store where he purchased a music cassette. He then gave it to me to take to my son. The string quartet music was by, whom else, Franz Schubert, Erich’s favorite composer.

Thirdly, I had great admiration for Erich’s modesty. I have already mentioned the volume of reminiscences from his students to honor Erich on his

75th birthday. The volume came about after I mentioned to Julie the idea of organizing a conference in Erich's honor. Julie asked Erich, but Erich said that he had already had one for his 60th birthday and that was enough. Julie suggested that a collection of reminiscences by his students would be something that Erich would appreciate, and he did.

The Lehmann Symposia provides us with more examples of Erich's modesty. I have already written about this in the preface to volume 44 of the IMS LNMS (2004). After approaching Erich about the organization of the first Lehmann Symposium, he refused to agree to it. After several efforts, he reluctantly agreed to participate.

The plans for the 3rd Lehmann Symposium were to hold the Symposium in Berkeley on November 20th of 2007 to celebrate Erich's 90th birthday. At least that is how it was being planned until Erich learned of the plan. He said, "Javier, I do not want it to turn into a birthday celebration. The Symposium must remain faithful to its original purpose". Some remarks about the events that led to changing the venue back to Rice University and the date to May of 2007, have appeared in Rojo (2009). I always had a deep admiration for Erich's modesty.

Fourthly, in spite of all these great human qualities, there is one that I try to emulate as much as I can. This is the one feature in Erich's character that I admired the most. His great love for his family! His face would light up when talking about Julie, his children, grand children, and great grandchildren. He would tell me, "Javier, have I told you the story about Julie or one of his children" and I would say yes, but you can tell me again. I think I enjoyed listening to the stories as much as he liked telling them. Erich, Professor Lehmann, was a wonderful person.

At the end of Erich and Julie's visit to El Paso in 1991, we gave them a small present. My wife wrote on the card "To Professor Lehmann and Professor Shaffer: thank you for everything. You have touched our lives in ways you can never imagine". After reading the card, Erich turned away from me. He did not want me to see the tears in his eyes.

To conclude, please allow me to paraphrase Lou Gehrig on his retirement speech – <http://www.lougehrig.com/about/speech.htm> – in Yankee Stadium on July 4th, 1939: "I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth" for having had the opportunity and honor to be Erich Lehmann's student; for the opportunity to work with him, laugh with him; and for

the opportunity to know, through his many wonderful stories, his wonderful family.

Bibliography

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- 3) J. Rojo (2009). Erich L. Lehmann, The Lehmann Symposia, and November 20th 1917. In *The Third Erich L. Lehmann Symposium — Optimality*, J. Rojo, Ed., *IMS Lecture Notes and Monogr. Ser.* **57** 1-7. Inst. Math. Statist., Beachwood, OH.