

Bill Shalinsky 1929-2019

In university departments there are official positions and informal roles. At the University of Waterloo School of Planning, then called School of Urban and Regional Planning, Bill Shalinsky played the unofficial role of wise and reflective adviser. I overlapped with him at the School over nearly ten years (1985-1994) and during this time would often seek his wisdom on different aspects of academic life. I especially appreciated his critical outlook on the directions the university was taking at a time when the focus was nearly entirely on the information technology turn, often at the expense of more traditional aspects of university education. But Bill Shalinsky was never aggressive when advancing his views, he was just very persistent.

The background of Bill Shalinsky was in social work, he held a doctorate in this field from Case Western Reserve University. Through his teaching he instilled social values in generations of students. He also introduced them to the techniques of public participation. His course on small group dynamics was especially popular. I frequently met former students who praised this course and the relevance of its content for their work as planners. Bill Shalinsky would sometimes comment on the large number of students in this course and the irony that a course on small groups was given to very large classes.

I have been on committees of graduate students under the supervision of Bill Shalinsky and witnessed the attention he gave to his students, his skills at guiding them through the details of thesis research and writing. And when confronted to crises, as occasionally happens in graduate committees, he gave his advice in a respectful and diplomatic manner. Graduate committees provided the small group context in which Bill Shalinsky was most effective. He graduated many MA and doctoral students, among them Jill Grant whom I consider to be the leading Canadian academic planner of her generation.

Bill Shalinsky was visually impaired, which prevented him from driving and reading small script. He was, however, able to carry out the different tasks of academic life and even painted as a hobby. His visual problems caused Bill Shalinsky to advocate for the rights of the handicapped. For example, he convinced the University of Waterloo to paint yellow stripes at the edges of outdoor steps to prevent accidents among the visually impaired.

During his years at the School of Planning, Bill Shalinsky lived in the Mary-Allen neighbourhood in Waterloo. His wife, Jennifer, an ardent defender of the neighbourhood, was a fixture in the local media. There must have been many conversations within the couple about the evolution of the neighbourhood. There was a rumour that as children in the Montreal NDG neighbourhood, Bill Shalinsky and William Shatner (Star Trek's Captain Kirk) were friends. Such a difference of scale in their life experience! One explored galaxies, the other had a deep influence on people close to him, who went on to make a better world – all of this on planet Earth.

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