



In Memory of Herb Grossman

Spreading Objectivism, one person at a time

In the late 1950s, a young man watched the movie *The Fountainhead* on late-night television. Herb Grossman (September 7, 1937 - May 26, 2021) was impressed by the ideas expressed in the movie, so he decided to read the book. Life would never be the same for him, and for so many others. He later found *Atlas Shrugged*, also written by Ayn Rand and recently published in 1957.

Herb was born and raised in the Bronx, NY by orthodox Jewish parents. He was never very religious. His passion was playing basketball, and he was also a lifelong Yankees fan. If he wasn't at home he was outside playing basketball, until he discovered *The Fountainhead*. He

pursued his education by getting his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Yeshiva University in Manhattan, within walking distance of where he grew up. While there, Herb decided to become a mathematics teacher at the high school level. He got his first position at James Monroe High School in the Bronx. A few years later, Herb received an offer for a better position in the Yonkers school system, just north of the Bronx. But there were two positions available for a math teacher, at two different schools. He chose Roosevelt High School, a choice that would make a profound difference in the lives of many students at Roosevelt.

Originally teaching algebra to 10th graders, he moved up a year or so later to 12th graders and taught pre-calculus, referred to as 12X at that time, and Calculus. He also taught Advanced Calculus to those who intended to go to college where calculus was a requirement. Herb was also a supporter and advocate of Ayn Rand's philosophy, Objectivism. In 1970, I, and other students, entered 12th grade math class. Little did we know that some of our lives were about to be transformed.

Let me state strongly, and this has been echoed by many of his students, Herb Grossman was the best teacher, not only in math but also in any subject that we have ever had during our educational careers. This includes many students who have gone on to get their PhDs. Herb's career stretched from the mid 1960s to the late 2010s at several high schools in the New York / New Jersey areas. His influence as a mentor, a person of intelligence and integrity, and a teacher with an ability to get students to understand mathematical concepts was profound. He didn't just show that mathematical concepts worked. He demonstrated how they were connected to real world problems and explained the hierarchy of concepts.

He kept the spirit of youth that is uncommon among people as they age. He had a quick wit and a unique sense of humor. Herb continued to love the Yankees throughout his life. He was a season ticket holder for many years. We went to several baseball games at Yankee Stadium, and one memorable game at the new Yankee Stadium. His sense of life was truly benevolent and he was generous with his knowledge. I never saw him depressed about the negative trends occurring in society. He demonstrated to me that if you understood the ideas behind events, one never had to be afraid of the world. Herb started a tradition lasting for decades of inviting current and former students to his house on the Friday after Thanksgiving. His home was often overflowing with friends and colleagues enlivened by intense intellectual debates.

The years of the late 1960s through the 1970s were turbulent and troubled. Many young people were looking for answers to help us understand the events around us. Herb provided the answers by introducing us to the philosophy of Ayn Rand. He became a one-man recruiting firm for Objectivism. During these years at Roosevelt High School, he would introduce students to Objectivism in many ways that were outside the official teaching schedules and classroom sessions. From quick discussions between classes to after-school meetings on his and the students' own time, he and his students would discuss politics, moral standards, foundations of knowledge, the scientific method, setting career goals, intellectual history and many other philosophical issues. Through these conversations, many students became interested in, and advocates of, Ayn Rand's philosophy. Many of his students went on to college and business. They have had productive careers, and have dispersed all over the country. A group of his students went on to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and wrote articles (and performed other tasks) for an Objectivist-oriented student newspaper called *Ergo*. Many students became lifelong friends of his; some had known him for over 50 years.

Herb was a lifelong learner. He read voraciously, and was always ready to loan out his books to his students. He loved fiction and economics. He was self-taught in economics and he taught economics to high school students. He gave lectures and seminars at prestigious conservative economic organizations, such as the Foundation for Economic Education and the Foundation for Free Enterprise. In addition to advocating reason, he was also an example of living by reason. Herb represented the best moral and intellectual role model to high school students who were searching for such a person in real life. One of his favorite expressions was "Don't hide behind the word 'we.'" He would utter it whenever he heard a student suggesting some collectivist notion about how society ought to do something about some social problem.

I cannot forget to mention my trips with Herb to see Ayn Rand speak at the Ford Hall Forum in Boston. From around 1973 until 1982, our annual trek to Boston to hear her speak is one of the highlights of my life. Many times, we traveled with other friends in the car; we met many friends there and had annual celebrations and parties with students from many of the local universities.

One of Herb's proudest achievements was meeting several times with Ayn Rand to teach her algebra. He started teaching her around 1980 until her untimely death in 1982.

Herb Grossman is survived by his wife of 49 years, Margie, and his daughter, Jennifer. They have become dear friends of mine.

Over the decades, Herb's influence has grown, as the students that he directly influenced began to influence others through their own passion about philosophy and joy in living. Today, nearly a half-century after some of his students had him as a teacher, Herb's wisdom and personal caring for important issues in his students' lives are remembered with fondness. His passing saddens us all, but his ideas and influence live on. I offer my gratitude for his introducing me to Objectivism at a critical time in my life, when I was developing an interest in intellectual issues and philosophy.

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Paul Cohen
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