My Boss, My Mentor, My Friend—
A Brief Memory

Alan Gould

Alan Friedman was my boss (from 1974-1986), my mentor, and my friend ever since. He was also my ideal example of a true gentleman. Evidence of this came almost every time he would say something. When he was being honored at the 40th Gala Anniversary of the Lawrence Hall of Science, I was struck by how he spoke in his opening words not of himself, but of all the other people who he felt had made important contributions to our collective work.

The first planetarium show I learned to present at the Lawrence Hall of Science was "Stonehenge," and that creation of his still stands among the best audience participation shows I know of. He was so creative and responsive to new ideas. When I came to him with feedback from my audiences, who wanted to see and hear more about the constellations, he went right to work on a new idea that became one of our most successful and replicated shows: "Constellations Tonight." I always use that one as an iconic example of audience participation. Instead of the presenter pointing out constellations and spewing out facts and stories, we start by simply handing out star maps to all the audience members and teaching them how to use them.

I’m proud and honored to be part of the team at the Hall that carries on the legacy of audience participation planetarium shows that Alan pioneered in the Participatory Oriented Planetarium (POP) workshops and the Planetarium Educator’s Workshop Guide, which evolved into Planetarium Activities for Successful Shows (PASS; now at http://www.planetarium-activities.org/). To this day we encourage other digital planetariums to include live audience participation in their repertoire of shows, and not to rely simply on recorded programs.

When Alan was President of the International Planetarium Society (1985-1986) I heard him say in a speech that the uniqueness of a planetarium experience comes in no small part from the feeling of community the audience can get by all being together and sharing the experience under the dome. And I’ll never forget one of the many things he taught me that comes up again and again. He said that when presenting a planetarium show and deciding what to include, we should always leave the audience wanting more, rather than trying to squeeze every idea and related fact into the show. Getting them excited is more important than cramming their brains with stuff they’ll forget anyway. I have found this wisdom to be applicable far beyond planetarium shows, including another expression related to this same idea: that students are not just empty vessels into which teachers should pour their knowledge.

I’m so lucky to have known Alan!

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Alan Gould was Director of the Lawrence Hall of Science Planetarium (UC Berkeley) from 1998-2009. He has over 36 years of experience developing and presenting hands-on science activities and 22 years of experience organizing and leading teacher education workshops. He was also Co-Investigator for Education and Public Outreach for the NASA Kepler mission (2000-2015), co-directs the Hands-On Universe project, and is co-author of Great Explorations in Math and Science (GEMS) teacher guides. Currently he works on the Full Option Science System (FOSS) middle school course revision team and directs the Global Systems Science high school curriculum project at Lawrence Hall of Science.