



How taking a course
led to a life-long friendship

Description

One never knows when you will run into a person who becomes a great friend

By Irwin Rapoport

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A few days ago, I spoke with my very good friend **Hugo Barreca**, who now lives in Brooklyn but whose family has established roots in Quebec on his mother's side. We met at **Concordia University** while taking a **modern German history course** taught by [Prof. Rosemarie Schade](#), an excellent lecturer and respected scholar. Needless to say she did not suffer fools gladly, and while many of us knew the basics, she provided many details that were crucial to understanding the history of the country from its creation in 1871 following the end of the Franco-Prussian War to the first decade of the 21st century.

Hugo and I became fast friends, often speaking with Prof. Schade after class and working together to prepare for the mid-term and the final exam. While preparing for the mid-term, about eight of us gathered on the sixth or seventh floor of the Hall Building to get ready for it. The mid-term consisted of short answers for ten individuals, events and organizations, and replying to one of two or three essay questions.

We met at Concordia University while taking a modern German history course taught by Prof. Rosemarie Schade, an excellent lecturer and respected scholar.

We were given a total of 40 terms to study and the essay questions. Prof. Schade was not giving anything away – far from it. Even though we had advanced knowledge of what to cover, she expected solid and informative responses to prove that we not only knew the material but, more importantly, were able to apply the knowledge in a cohesive and logical manner.

As we were going over the terms for the short answers, we had one person taking notes and each of us contributing information for each one. I started off and rattled away for about 13, which was appreciated. I knew my stuff, and that impressed the group. We had a lot of fun over that hour and a half, creating an excellent study



guide that was updated as the mid-term approached. For the essay questions, we followed a similar approach. Of course, several of us had differing views, but we agreed on the basics. Sharing that knowledge gave us an edge. We repeated the same process for the in-class final that resembled the mid-term.

Prof. Schade's technique required us to study the material and understand it in connection with the bigger picture and small strands. Thus, we learned that the monetary crisis, which the Weimar Republic experienced in the 1920s, had its roots in Kaiser Wilhelm II's massive military budgets leading up to World War I and the expenditures related to the war effort. We also had to write seven or eight small essays on articles and chapters from books, which gave us additional background material. The classes were engaging, and Prof. Schade encouraged smart dialogue. She brought in original documents from the Nazi era. Her father was a Wehrmacht officer who served for a time in Norway during World War II.

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Needless to say, many of us gave our professor high marks when we filled out the course evaluations.

I did not mean to digress, but it was important to establish how Hugo and I met, and I did enjoy that course. As noted, Hugo is now living in New York City, married to **Melinda Alfano**, who hails from Montreal.

Hugo and I became good friends and for that, I consider myself fortunate. As we got to know each other better, we both realized that we were huge fans of [*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*](#) and [*The Colbert Report*](#), which truly cemented the friendship. Our politics were similar; we both thoroughly enjoyed reading history books, shared the same sense of humour, had a similar knowledge base, and shared many interests and passions. It was as if we had known each other forever. We can finish each other's sentences and, by simply uttering one word, know what we are thinking and going to say.

We have our disagreements, but they never get out of hand, and nearly 100 percent of the time, it turns out that we actually agreed. The difference was that we were coming to the same conclusion from pieces of knowledge and viewpoints that neither of us considered. Once we realized the basis of the viewpoint, everything fit together. I continue to learn as much from Hugo as he does from me.

As it turned out, we also enjoyed many of the same movies. We differ somewhat on music but share enough in common, from classical and jazz to classic rock and alternative music. We still share articles and links. In addition to similar tastes, it's clear that a passion for education and knowledge binds us, and we both like to have our values, morals, ethics, and positions challenged.

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When I recently spoke with Hugo – it had been weeks since we last conversed, and it was as if no time had passed. Thinking about the conversation, I pointed out to Hugo that it was as if we were hosting our own combination of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. It was that good. We both laughed and made ridiculous jokes based on history and current events, and whatever problems were pressing us at the moment were temporarily cast aside.

When we meet in person, it is as if we had seen each other just a few hours earlier. Nothing escapes our attention when we get into the nitty-gritty. The conversation we had dealt with the Allied bombing campaigns of Germany and Japan, covering their effectiveness, morality, necessity, origins, and how they impacted people on



both sides. His grandfather, also named Hugo, was part of a B-24 bomber crew and had completed 24 missions as a radioman and waist-gunner, surviving the war. Our talk, which went on for over an hour, was hilarious and serious. It truly reflected our friendship and the pattern of our previous discussions.

Hugo lived in Montreal for about two years and is close to completing his degree to become a teacher, with the preference to teach history. I do not doubt that his students will be enthralled by his passion and knowledge. Hugo introduced me to [Howard Zinn](#)'s books, and I am sure he will introduce his students to many celebrated and new historians who are making their mark.

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It would be great if Hugo returned to live in Montreal. I hope to visit him soon enough once the COVID-19 situation eases.

Hugo is an excellent friend and he very much appreciated me introducing him to the [Bill and Ted films](#) – **Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure** and **Bill and Ted's Bogus Adventure**. I am very fortunate that I met Hugo and via him, Melinda. Their wedding celebration was wonderful and all who attended were pleased by the ceremony and the ease with which the guests met and conversed.

It was a long chain of events that led me to take that German history course, and I am very grateful that I did. The lesson here is that one never knows when you will run into a person who becomes a great friend.

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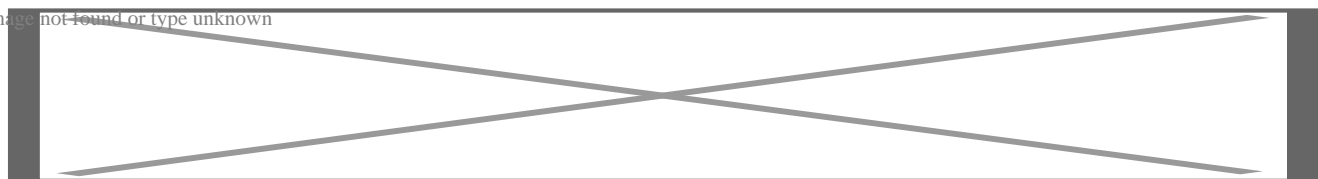
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