Remembering Ross Honsberger

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University of Waterloo offered two courses in Problem Solving that were numbered something like C&O 380 and 381, at the time. I took both of these courses, the second with Ross Honsberger. Ross Honsberger loved mathematics and problems. His passionate engagement with the ideas and the smiling sense of amusement he brought to the sharing of problems was special. Ross focused attention on problems he found to be rich. Many of these problems would be found in his expository books such as *Mathematical Gems* or *Mathematical Morsels* – enriching resources in themselves. He tended to spend most of an entire class on a particular problem or a piece of mathematics such as the Butterfly Theorem. It was enjoyable to be in the midst of a mathematician who demonstrated such a passion for the field.

A Curious Connection

Jim Totten was a colleague with whom I shared problems through collaborations with the BC Mathematics Contests. The relationship deepened as a member of the Editorial Board during Jim’s tenure as Editor of *Crux Mathematicorum with Mathematical Mayhem*. One thing learned through communications was how Jim was deeply influenced by Ross Honsberger. He considered Ross to be a mentor and an inspiration with respect to mathematical problem solving, in particular. Jim Totten had a Problem of the Week feature through his years of teaching undergraduates, briefly at St. Mary’s University in Halifax and subsequently in Cariboo College (and its subsequent renamings to finally Thompson Rivers University) in Kamloops. Upon Jim’s sudden passing I was given a gift of the red binders containing the different problems that had been used by Jim over 25+ years with this feature. The collection was given to me with an intention of having it written up and shared, as it had been his intention in retirement to develop a resource. In fact, Jim authored Volume VII of the *A Taste of Mathematics* Series entitled *Problems of the Week* containing 80 of the problems. This was his start of a bigger project. Later, I, along with Joseph Khoury and Bruce Shawyer, co-edited *Jim Totten’s Problems of the Week* (World Scientific Publishing, 2013). An excerpt from the Preface is offered here in tribute to Ross Honsberger as a person.

Jim never pretended that the problems were original. The problems come from many sources, including several brought to his attention during his graduate studies at University of Waterloo from 1968 to 1974. It was there that Jim became acquainted with Ross Honsberger. Jim described himself as a willing listener when Ross wanted to share interesting problems or solutions with someone. This excitement for gems was contagious to Jim, and he proceeded to carry forth his own love of problems with a commitment to sharing that spirit of his own.

My final personal communications with Ross Honsberger surrounded Jim’s passing.
in different respects. There was a special issue of *Crux Mathematicorum with Mathematical Mayhem* dedicated to Jim Totten (Volume 35, issue 5). Ross graciously received a request to make a contribution of a problem for this issue, and went well beyond the request to prepare a seven-page article discussing a particular problem, namely, *The Tanker Problem*:

> A security patrol boat repeatedly circles a supertanker that is a gigantic rectangular box 450 metres long and 50 metres across. The ocean is calm and the tanker travels at a constant speed along a straight path. The patrol boat goes up the left side, across the front, down the right side, and across the back, and keeps doing it over and over.

> The patrol boat travels in only two directions of the compass – when going parallel to the path of the tanker, it travels in straight lines parallel to the tanker, one on each side at a distance of 25 metres from it, and when crossing in front or behind, it goes straight across perpendicular to the path of the tanker.

> Neglecting the dimensions of the patrol boat (that is, considering it to be represented geometrically by a point) and given that it goes constantly at twice the speed of the tanker and that its turns are instantaneous, what is the shortest distance that the patrol boat must travel in completing one cycle around the tanker?

**Closing remarks**

I am grateful for the presence of Ross Honsberger along my mathematical path. I continue to play with the content of some of his problem books. Upon reconnecting with Ross concerning the *Crux* article, I mentioned that we had held a conference honouring Jim Totten earlier in 2009, and that he may like a copy of the proceedings. I close with mention of this as the gracious spirit of Ross Honsberger was exemplified in his later communication: “The mailman delivered the Tribute to Jim Totten this morning. I am looking forward to reading it all. It’s my kind of thing! I am delighted to have a copy. My sincerest thanks.”

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