

## EDITED Sobel Tribute speech transcription-Janice Lynn Shuhan

Thank you. Good evening. I would like to share two experiences from “ancient times.” We will call the first one the intro to MSU. I first met Max Sobel as a freshman, freshmen orientation in 1977 at Montclair State Memorial Auditorium. He was the keynote speaker. Now if there was ever any doubt about entering the teaching profession, this innovative speaker made certain that I, (as I’m sure many others in the room), left there motivated enough not only to complete the undergraduate program but to also land a teaching job and maybe even make a return visit to Montclair State for their graduate studies while working full time in their field. Max Sobel was a wonderful liaison between one’s aspiration and one’s pursuit.

Besides being a great motivational speaker, Max Sobel had a sense of warmth, class and a respect that invited you into the profession and made certain you were in it for the long run (i.e. positive infinity). In my opinion this was a crucial characteristic for a professor in the 70s. What I mean is... the times were different. For example in my high school Calc honors class, then called Calculus Enriched, out of the fifteen students that enrolled in the class ten of them were boys, and the ratio wasn’t much different when I began my classes at MSU. In any event, after I walked up and congratulated Max Sobel on his inspirational address, I thought to myself, “Gee, if this is what the profs were like at Montclair State I am going to really love it here!” So I eagerly hoofed it over to the Math/Science building to meet my advisor. When I got up to the second floor, I ran into a second professor at Montclair State and asked where I could find my advisor-- and with a funny grin-- he kind of gave me the once-over and said, “Are you sure you are in the right place? This is the Math/Science building.” Oh well I guess we’ll just chalk it up to the 70s... and so my journey at Montclair State had begun! But Max Sobel was the ideal host for welcoming students into the learning program and into the teaching profession.

At Max Sobel’s recommendation I joined NCTM and later AMTNJ and started attending most of those standing-room-only lectures on “Motivation.” These lectures by far gave me the “fix” I needed to persevere, and from the overwhelming attendance at these lectures there were many others who came for their “Max fix.” Like me they all went to the conferences to get re-energized and like the Energizer Bunny they kept on “going and going, and going...”

For the second “ancient” experience, and let's call this one *self-actualization*, occurred when I first had Max Sobel for a course. It was at the final undergraduate semester just before student teaching when I took the famous *Methods of Teaching Mathematics* course. Now by this

time the ratio of men to women was about 1-to-1 and this course assured me beyond a shadow of a doubt that I really *was* in the *right* place.

After a few lessons in which Dr. Sobel entertained different methods of motivating students, he assigned our first project: Choose a geometric topic and select a method of teaching it to a tired group of uninterested teenagers (i.e. think outside the box of the traditional 70s math classroom). Have it ready for the next session. During the next session Dr. Sobel is seated in the rear. I enter the room with a bag, then I left the room before it was my turn to go up and then when I was called, I entered the room in ancient Asian ceremonial attire. I placed my colored shapes on the overhead glass, stepped up on top of the chair and then on top of the teacher's desk and using the overhead screen proceeded to demonstrate a lesson on Chinese Tangrams. Not sure how I remained serious for ten minutes while the class totally lost it, and Dr. Sobel's face was beet red and beaming. It was a blast! Max Sobel validated and even encouraged non-traditional teaching methods, and for me these methods blossomed and lasted throughout my teaching --career and even influenced my choice of doctoral topics from my research. My general topic was "an interdisciplinary approach to teaching geometry through the multiple intelligences." Some here may recall five years later Max and I coauthored an article of this type for the New Jersey Mathematics Teacher in 2011. (editor's note: article was reprinted in NJMT in July 2017 Vol 75 No 1 pages 9-16)

Max Sobel's message to teachers *then* is still good *now*. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone to make Math fun for your students. Max was a visionary and a legend, and I know he would love it if you could help me conclude with a cadence he often used to end his conference lectures. Are you game?? [Audience respond yes, sure, ...] He first would ask, "Will anyone who has *ever* taught mathematics please rise? [Almost all stand up]. Kindly repeat after me, hold... wait for it... "Two, four, six, eight, teaching math is truly great." [Audience repeat.] Then Max would normally say "Oh, come on, you can do better than that! 2,4,6,8, teaching math is truly great!!" [Audience repeats louder]. [slight pause--then just me]:

Two, four, six, eight, knowing Max was truly great-- and thank you for honoring him!