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Eric Stein, 1913-2011

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ERIC STEIN, 1913–2011

*Joseph Vining**

Eric kept all of us on the faculty from feeling our age. He was interested in us all to the very end. I am seventy-three, which I find hard to believe every time I think of it, but I always knew during our forty-two years of friendship and working together that I could have been Eric's son. As time has passed, a larger and larger number of the faculty could have been my sons and daughters and Eric's grandsons and granddaughters—certainly you can't be a grandchild without feeling young somewhere inside yourself.

His was a natural and serene end. He had talked to me about his wish that he could believe in Providence and life after our natural death, but he had come to think that only if one had had childhood experience to build on could one enter into an adult faith in any concrete way. That he had not had. Yet he was completely open to others' faith. He devoted himself to the good of others on the largest scale and beyond his span of life. He loved music and was no relativist about it or where music could take you.

And he was a poet. He would send me via campus mail short handwritten poems of his, especially in recent years (and in the back of my mind as I received each one I would think, "Only at Michigan Law School could this happen.") I found I was able to show him some efforts of my own, and we talked about the urge to poetry and its source.

So when during his last weeks in hospice I began to visit him in the evenings, I asked whether he would like me to read him some poetry. He said he would like it very much. To start, we selected poems about music, going back to Dryden with the help of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and then went to poems that were musical, even to Hopkins's strange music. All this took him so far back, he said. I confessed it did me too. Sometimes he compared lines from poems in German, speaking them to what he knew were my uneducated ears.

We returned to Wordsworth time and again. On the last night I read to him, thirty-six hours before he left, it was from the last part of the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. We started with

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound

.....

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour

* Harry Burns Hutchins Collegiate Professor Emeritus of Law, University of Michigan Law School.

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not . . .

One old man was reading to another a quarter-century older, and this spoke to both. We reached

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forbode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might . . .

He stopped me and asked me to repeat it, and then said, "That is so beautiful."