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Mary Haas as a Teacher

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This will of necessity be a personal rather than a general statement, for I am sure each one of Mary Haas's students has his or her own special memories of her teaching, but I suspect that much of what I say will resonate with others and I also hope it will generate more thoughts on the subject.

First of all, let me place my experience in time. I was a student at Berkeley officially from 1959 to 1966, which included two semesters of field work and one year at UCSD. Unlike many of Mary's students, I started as an undergraduate major and I believe I was one of the first undergraduates admitted in the then new undergraduate linguistics program for which Bill Shipley was the undergraduate advisor. I took several courses from her: Introduction to American Indian Languages, Field Methods, a seminar on theoretical linguistics and a field workers' seminar. And of course I wrote my dissertation under her direction, although the final version was written in San Diego and comments from her were only in the form of correspondence.

I have had many wonderful teachers at Berkeley. Some were superb lecturers, some were beautifully organized, some were charismatic, some were demanding and critical. In comparison, Mary was not really any of those things. Her style in the classroom was always low key, perhaps a little aloof, the material she presented was to me at least quite overwhelming, especially the Introduction to American Indian Languages where we were to memorize all the North American language names as well as their classification, of which I despaired since I had had no previous exposure to the topic at all. But she also presented data from her own research, in particular Algonkian and Muskogean material; she wrote the relevant forms on the board in her beautiful hand and we copied it frantically. Remember this was before xeroxing, let alone computers. Classic readings such as Boas's Introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages were available on reserve at the library, and their content internalized during many long hours of note-taking; there was no textbook. In classroom presentations, wedged inconspicuously among the details of a problem would suddenly be found an observation so profound as to leave me breathless, though it could easily have been missed.

In my experience as an undergraduate, there was rather little personal contact with the faculty. I did my work, turned in the assignments, got a grade. On Mary's part, there was very little hand-holding or praise, which made the very rare low-key praise all the more exhilarating. We were there to learn and we did. The true impact of her teaching did not crystallize for me until some years later, when I would occasionally enjoy what I thought was a deep insight only to remember that I had learned it from her and rediscovered it.

Her overriding concern as a teacher was to impart to her students the fundamental principles and methodology of linguistic analysis and a deep respect for language and languages. This she did mostly by example, demonstrating through her own research results. She shared her love of

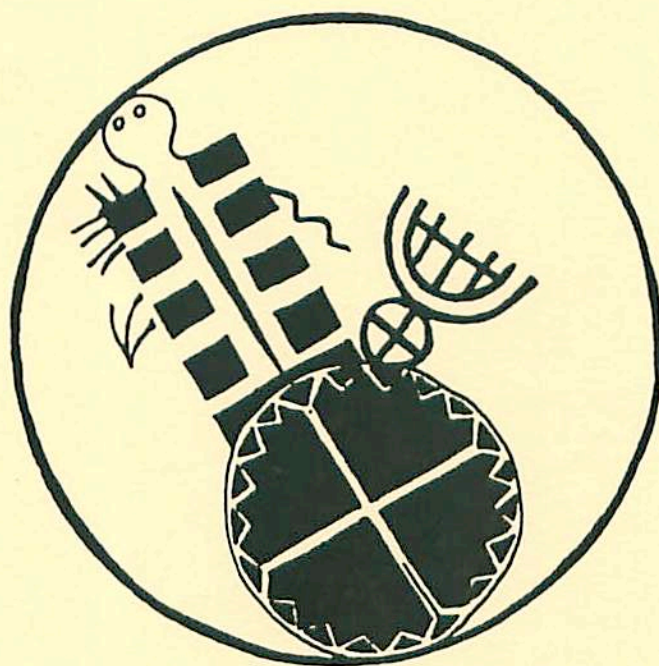
language, its diversity, its universality, the complex and structured ways in which it reflects people's thoughts and varied cultures. She insisted on the mastery of the basic skills of analysis and scholarship and she shared with us the excitement of comparative/historical work. Later, she warned against the mistakes of the untrained fieldworker and the blind acceptance of fashionable new claims. But mostly she treated us as adults and as future scholars. Beyond the fundamentals, she never attempted to force her views on us. We were supposed to develop our own conceptions of the field and styles of research. Haas students are not poured out of a mold, they go their own way in full confidence that their training will be relevant.

I came to realize all this long after leaving Berkeley and found myself almost unconsciously trying to incorporate her approach into my own teaching style. As I struggled to report my own research in print, I also came to admire more and more the clarity and simplicity of her writing, some of which should be required reading for all linguists. I also learned to know Mary better and to enjoy her friendship. Particularly wonderful was the Winter quarter of 1977 which she as well as Shirley Silver spent in residence at UCSD. It was then I finally understood that her students were her intellectual family and I believe each and everyone of us has experienced this kinship, and the fierce loyalty we all felt to her. She lives on in her descendants, students, grandstudents, great-grandstudents, and so on. We must make sure they take pride in their heritage.

In conclusion I'd like to share with you specific illustrations of some of the points I made earlier. On going into the field, she warned: "No unanalyzed texts!" On writing a dissertation: "A dissertation is meant to be a piece of original research. It's your dissertation. I'm not going to tell you how to do it." On the question of praise: I wrote a paper once long after leaving Berkeley. Mary read it and sent me a note which said: "I think you're on to something." What more could anyone ask for?

REPORT 10

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**



**THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN &
J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES
And
THE MARY R. HAAS
MEMORIAL**

**June 28-29, 1996
University of California at Berkeley**

Leanne Hinton, Editor

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cover design by Leanne Hinton (Santa Barbara Chumash rock painting)

This volume is dedicated to the memory of

MARY R. HAAS

Professor emeritus of Linguistics

at the University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

This volume of the Survey Reports is the Proceedings of the Hoka, Penutian and J.P. Harrington Conferences, held at the University of California at Berkeley on June 28-29, 1996. Part I includes five of the papers that were presented at that conference, and also a paper by George V. Grekoff, who was unable to attend the conference but arranged in advance to submit an article for inclusion in the Proceedings. During the conference, a memorial session was also held for Mary R. Haas, who died a month before the conference. Part II of this volume consists of the presentations that were made about her life and research.

We gratefully acknowledge grants from Joseph Cerny, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate Division, and William Simmons, Dean of Social Sciences, that helped make this conference possible.

Leanne Hinton
Volume and Series Editor

THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN AND J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES

and the

MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL SESSION

June 28-29, 1996
University of California at Berkeley, Alumni House

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