

## Retirement Reception for Michael Broide

29 April 2022

*Remarks I made at an end-of-year party in honor of physics graduates and me.*

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I'm not sure what it is going to feel like when I retire. After all, I've spent my entire life in school. At this point, I think that I'm in something like 57th Grade.

When I started here, I was pretty close in age to you guys. And then little by little I ended up the age of your parents and beyond. When I started, it was just my wife and me. Then we got a dog, and a house, and our daughter was born. How did she get to be 25? When did I lose my hair? I feel like my whole life happened while I was at LC.

So it is really hard to separate my identity from Lewis & Clark.

What's so weird about being a teacher is that you guys stay the same age. You are always 18-22 years old. It is like that Oscar Wilde novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The trouble is, I'm the painting aging behind the scenes while you stay immortally young.

My journey into teaching began in elementary school. There was a talent show, and I did a magic trick. I walked out with a piece of newspaper, tape, and a scissor. I cut a long strip and I taped it into a loop. I then cut the loop in half lengthwise. No surprise, a cut loop became two loops. I did it again, but this time I put a half twist in the loop before taping it. For you math people: I made a Möbius strip. When I cut that loop in half, it opened up into one big loop. And then I did it once again, but this time I made a full twist. And when I cut that loop in half, I got two loops, but they were linked together like links on a chain!

It's a great trick and it still amazes me. If there is a topologist in the crowd, we need to talk!

On the night of the performance, my parents gave me a black cape so I would look the part of a magician. The cape was a little too long for my 12-year-old body, so it dragged on the floor behind me. I did my tricks, and then I started to slowly back up, so my friend and magic partner Howie could do his tricks. Well, my heels stepped onto the dragging cape. The top of the cape was tied around my neck. So, as I walked backwards, the cape yanked on my neck and pulled my center of mass backwards past my heels. And boom: I fell backwards like a falling tree.

The crowded auditorium was hysterical. Everyone I knew was there: my teachers, my friends, my parents, my friend's parents. They were all laughing. (Like you are now!) What could I do, how could I recover? I stood up, like nothing had happened, and I bowed. I bowed a couple more times. And then I carefully walked off the stage.

I discovered something that night. I was a shy kid. I was—I am—an introvert. But when I was on stage with my props, I could open up. *Look: here is something mysterious, something surprising.* And although it hurt to take a fall, I loved making people laugh.

My whole life has been about recreating that moment.

Because when I'm in the classroom something extraordinary happens: I feel like I belong; I feel like I'm part of something bigger than myself; I feel accepted and understood.

For me, it is not really about physics or math or humor. Those are just my tricks. It's about you. It is about the invisible thread that connects us. Thousands of threads stretched across continents of time. That is what I cherish.