One of my mentors

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Howard McKaughan holds a special place in my memories as the person who hired me into academe and then gave me gentle guidance along the way at various points when I needed it and sought him out. I had been earning my keep as an educator while also doing linguistic field work in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands for the better part of a decade, and had just been awarded the PhD in Linguistics by Indiana University for my dissertation on the place names of the Marshall Islands. We met on Saipan in 1964, where Howard was traveling on business for the East-West Center (EWC) and I was working on a Territory-wide assignment for the Director of Education. We met after work where people usually congregated at that hour, at the Club Toppa Tapi high atop so-called Army Hill, near where the High Commissioner’s office was located and where contract employees like myself lived. I don’t recall the details of our conversation, but I do recall it as being a pleasant one.

I am sure we talked about Hawai‘i, where I had begun my work in the Pacific, in 1953, when the High Commissioner’s office was still located there, at Ft. Ruger. I am also sure I asked about people I knew in the Anthropology Department at the University of Hawai‘i (UH) like Samuel H. Elbert and Leonard Mason, and, of course, I was interested to learn that Howard was heading up a new Department of Linguistics. The full significance of our meeting didn’t dawn on me until a month or so later, when two other UH faculty, Don Topping and Ted Plaister, came to Saipan to conduct an EWC workshop. Ted got me aside and conveyed to me Howard’s invitation to join the new department. This came at a time when the Benders were feeling the need for access to more conventional schooling for their children, and by mid November of 1964 (just days after my two-year contract with the Trust Territory government was completed) I joined the faculty that I would retire from in the year 2000.

Because the position in Linguistics wouldn’t actually be established until the following September, Howard asked me to spend the remainder of the 1964–65 academic year working in the English Language Institute, which had been established by the EWC to improve the English ability of the many new graduate students from Asia and the Pacific whom the Center was sponsoring at the University. The Institute had been transferred to UH and put under the Department of Linguistics in compliance with an agreement between the two institutions that all instruction would be the responsibility of the University. Thus, I didn’t become a member of the department Howard was chairing until September 1965.

Howard’s style as chair was to do a lot of consulting about the more important decisions to be made, and to have a minimum of faculty meetings. The faculty was small, still numbering in single digits then, and the doors of our offices on the third floor of Kuykendall Hall (our new home) were usually open. It was not unusual for us to drop in on each other to talk about whatever we were working on, or to have the department chair drop by and see what we thought about one thing or another. Also, many of us ate lunch together at the EWC cafeteria a block away. But Howard did not remain with us for long. Near the end of my first year in the department, he called a few of us together and informed us that he would be moving to a position as associate dean of the Graduate Division, and that George

Grace would take over as head of the department, with me serving as assistant chair to look after some of the routine matters. From then on, we knew that we had a friend in the administration, even though Howard was scrupulous in not extending to us anything beyond our due. He was not associate dean for long, either. When Dean Wytze Gorter, who had brought him into the associate position, became chancellor of the Mānoa campus, Howard replaced him as dean of the Graduate Division and director of research. In the latter role, he oversaw much of UH’s early development into a major research university, with the growth of its institutes and centers for astronomy, oceanography, geology and geophysics, and cancer research, to mention just a few.

For a number of years while I was chair of the Department of Linguistics, I also served as chair of our graduate faculty, and in that role had constant dealings with Howard and his staff at Graduate Division. Under their tutelage, I developed a finer appreciation of what constitutes quality graduate education, while seeing scores of graduate students through their programs, thus dealing with their admission, the formation of their program committees, and their progress through examinations onward to the final defense of dissertation. As other contributors to this volume indicate, Howard went on from overseeing graduate education and research to the position of vice-chancellor for the entire Mānoa campus, and at times served as acting chancellor.

I felt this global view reflected in an e-mail message I received from him in 2003, soon after I had been appointed to the UH Board of Regents, which read as follows.

Dear Byron: My sources say you have been appointed to the BOR, and that it has been confirmed, though not all nominated got that confirmation. I surely hope you find colleagues on the Board that you can work with comfortably. Do you have to completely retire from faculty now? Best wishes. I am really pleased, for I am sure you will do an excellent job. You surely know the University from both departmental responsibilities and Faculty-wide participation in the Faculty Senate. Best wishes. Howard.

He knew from his own administrative experience that individual regents can do little or nothing on their own, that it is only when they find colleagues they “can work with comfortably” that they are able to have appreciable effect. That is what stuck with me from his message and what has helped guide me in my approach to such service.

In my time as editor of Oceanic Linguistics (which took place after Howard had retired from UH and moved to Oregon), I had occasion to consult him from time to time by email, as he continued to serve on the editorial board of the journal’s monograph series, and I found myself still learning from him, not just in the nitty-gritty of individual decisions, but also in what might be termed best practices of editorial consultation. And it was always a pleasure—and still is—to see him when he passes through Hawai‘i on his way to and from his numerous postretirement assignments in Southeast Asia.

In sum, what continues to impress me about Howard is his warm humanity on the one hand and his intellect and incisiveness on the other. He was never one to put on airs, as department chair, dean, or chancellor. He talked little about himself, but I gather that his origins were humble. He brought his father, who was visiting from California, to campus one day, and invited several of us in the department to have lunch with the two of them. His father had been a farmer, but by 1965 his former acres had been swallowed up by metropolitan Los Angeles. If he had been well recompensed, it was not obvious in his person or lifestyle. He was a humble and quiet man, who doted on his son, and whose son treated him with great deference.

The bulk of Howard’s academic publications came in the third quarter of the past century, and an impressive listing it is. It is clear that his insights into Maranao influenced the...

They had met and had extensive conversations while Fillmore was still a graduate student at
the University of Michigan. There would have been many more titles in Howard’s publication
list today had he not been drafted into full-time administrative service at UH in 1966.

There some of his other talents came into fuller play. Legend has it that Howard was a
boxer for a time in his earlier years, and although I have never been able to confirm this, I
can well believe it, from his build, his stance, and his presence. As director of research, there
were limits to the fiscal largess that could be granted to the various research units, and times
when their directors—themselves often noted scholars and sometimes prima donnas—had to
be turned down. Applications for new doctoral programs sometimes had to be denied by the
graduate dean. In his stint as campus head (chancellor) there were many more who sought
favorable decisions that could not always be granted. I, of course, did not witness many of
these encounters firsthand, but I sometimes heard from the disappointed, directly or
indirectly. Howard was skilled in finding solutions for valid requests, and many came away
with all they wanted, and some with a bit less, but others were empty-handed. He was also
skilled in putting the best construction possible on any situation, so that those settling for
little or nothing, I imagine, heard sympathetic words and saw an engaging smile, but also
saw, beneath it, the jutting jaw of a former pugilist.

References
