

**Start Here:
In remembrance of JLH**

As I struggle to begin this reminiscence (having written and erased several dud openings) I hear John impatiently, humorously, clearing his throat, then growled “eh-hmm.” In my mind’s eye, I catch a glimpse of the raised eyebrow: bother that sentimental pap – say something particular. Six years as John’s student gave me his invaluable editorial voice in my mind’s ear.

In graduate school, when I showed John a text, I generally got it back with a line down the center of page one and about three quarters of page two, then a neat little arrow in the lefthand margin, and in small, trim letters, “start here.” This was invariably the point at which I’d exhausted the opening flourishes and was ready to begin in earnest.

In my first year of teaching, at Iowa State, I was a city kid in agribusiness country with zero teaching experience, uprooted and out of my depth. Craving guidance, I invited John to give a lecture. He delivered a characteristically elegant presentation of *The Sun in the Church*, and in the car back to the hotel, an equally elegant peptalk, understated but powerful: eyes on the prize, write your book, all will be well. “Start here.”

A few years ago, I visited John and Alison in Oxfordshire with my son Oliver, then a rising college sophomore. He was enchanted – by the house with its magnificent library, by John’s erudition and wry wit, the garden, the meal, the ramble through the fields. John walked us to the local church and showed us the centuries-old hole in the wall where it had been made into a solar observatory. He recounted his theologico-philosophical strolls with the deacon. He mentioned he’d read Galileo’s collected works from back to front, figuring there’d be good stuff at the end that people wouldn’t have gotten to, and sure enough discovered a connection between Galileo’s mathematics and his gambling habit. John showed Oliver his first edition of the *Encyclopédie*, and when Oliver looked up *vérité*, commended him on his choice. The next year, Oliver declared a history major; now he’s a first-year graduate student. Again! Start here.

When John died, I realized I’d never thought that could happen; I assumed, childishly, that he was immortal. But I retain a tangible sense of his presence: in his books, in my own habits of mind, and in the aptitude he taught me for finding a place to begin.