A Book of Letters for Robin Room

CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS of RESEARCH and SERVICE
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Compiled by Margaret Hamilton
A Book of Letters for Robin Room, Celebrating Fifty Years of Research and Service

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Cover photo: Robin going through twenty-eight years of papers stored in various closets and bathrooms at ARG just before he moved to Toronto in 1991.

Frontispiece: Robin toasting everyone at SoRAD Swedish-style for their seven years of dedicated, rewarding work just before he moved to Melbourne in 2006.

Photo by Jessica Storbjörk
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Introduction

When I approached Robin in Stockholm in July 2001 to ask what it would take to ‘bring him home’, his initial response was that he might be too old—too old to be accepted by another university; too old to be allowed back into Australia to work; or too old to see new PhD students through to the end of their degrees.

But who would think Robin might be too old? Too old for what? Certainly not too old to retain his prodigious intellect. Not too old to remember most everything that has ever been written about alcohol policy, research or matters of alcohol-related interest. Not too old to work long and hard or too old to travel for work—as his full-steam ahead schedule has demonstrated over these past eight years since Robin did, in fact, take up the challenge and returned to the far-flung country of his birth. For eight years he has been challenging Australia to examine its alcohol policies while supporting and mentoring a next generation of alcohol and other drugs researchers.

Robin has a history of travel and work running in parallel. At sixteen this meant taking up the exciting prospect of leaving Sydney to set out for university in the United States, first at Princeton and then for graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley. There, a summer job at the California Drinking Practices Study grew into subsequent research positions and leadership of the Social Research Group. After twenty-eight years at SRG (which became the Alcohol Research Group) Robin moved to Toronto to be vice-president for research at the Addiction Research Foundation. Seven years later his position disappeared in a merger, and after half a year in Norway en route, he settled in Stockholm for seven years working to build a thriving Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs. In 2006 Robin completed a full circle with his return, after fifty years away, to Australia. Now in Melbourne, Robin is leading the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research located at Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre. He is a professor at the University of Melbourne, with CAPR’s program and his position is funded separately by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and the Victorian Department of Health.

In five countries on three continents, the response to Robin has remained consistent: the reach of his intellect is quickly apparent, his research interests are ever-growing and vital and his commitment to mentorship is eagerly taken up. He has supervised forty PhDs. Although close to his heart, this has been a fraction of his work. He continues to consult with governments and non-government organisations around the world, and still loves working with colleagues on international collaborative
projects. Robin holds fiercely to his values and standards and expects the same of others. Perhaps most consistently, he has persistently recreated the same office environment throughout his career.

Robin has engaged us in fascinating discussions over many years on wildly diverse topics: from the beer halls of Bulawayo to the liquor Licences Reduction Board in Victoria, from lognormal curves to the epistemology of discourses on drug policy—and so much more. He is a repository of references on almost anything in this field and stands eager to suggest further reading for anyone interested—whether or not they want more. His consistent, warm spirit and sense of fun are enduring and endearing.

When Alison Ritter and I notified people of the plan to hold a spring celebration and Festschrift for Robin, quite a few answered incredulously: ‘Robin can't possibly be retiring!’, because those who know him well know that his ever stopping work is highly unlikely. The decision to hold a special celebration of Robin’s completing fifty years as an alcohol researcher was made in the knowledge that if we waited for Robin to retire, we might never have the opportunity to acknowledge the influence he has had on so many as well as on research scholarship and alcohol and drug policy around the globe.

This Book of Letters has been compiled through efforts Alison and I made to contact Robin’s colleagues and previous collaborators. They have responded with warm reflections in a mix of brief thanks, humorous anecdotes, poems, photos and heartfelt letters.

This resulting book is divided into sections which have been framed by Robin’s own answers to a question we asked his wife, Gretchen, to pose: ‘As you think back over the last fifty years, what would you choose as the ten projects, or areas of work that have mattered the most to you, to the field or to the world?’ We then used Robin’s answers as the introduction for each of the sections, followed by the ‘letters’ that came from those colleagues who have worked with Robin in that area. We asked Robin to choose the section where each of these colleagues would best be placed—not an easy task, since through the years many of them have worked with him in more than one area. Of course we did not show him what anyone had written!

In managing the various styles of contribution, we have decided to give the contributors the cross-cultural experience of reading their own words in Australian-style spelling and punctuation.

Robin, there are numerous people and institutions to be thanked on the day—which we will enjoy doing. And there is much here for you and your colleagues, as well as for your family and friends to read and mull over. These pages include many memories of you as a colleague, collaborator and friend. They will resonate with all of us, including
your family. It’s clear that it was your childhood family who nurtured the development of your research abilities, including your keen observational skills. There are stories from your childhood in the bush of Sydney’s outer suburbs that tell how you and your sister Rosie learned to tell apart and then named all thirty of your family chooks. Even then you had a passion for defending the underdog, because no matter which of the no-longer-laying hens your mother planned to eat for dinner, you would try to convince her to stop by declaring, ‘Not _____! She’s one of the great ones!’ No doubt this planted seeds of the paper you and Klaus Mäkelä produced in 1985, ‘Alcohol Policy and the Rights of the Drunkard’, which began as your combined response when you jointly received the Jellinek Award in 1983 for your work on the relationship between drinking in the general population and drinking problems.

Your encyclopedic fascination with information and your memory are often admired in these letters; perhaps they were sparked by your sleeping in your father’s study right next to the 1928 Encyclopedia Britannica. We are thankful that its pieces on astronomy did not capture you in adulthood as it did then, when you avidly read every article on astronomy by torchlight under the bed covers. We recognise, however, that it is perhaps this fascination with bigger pictures that gave you the expansive, perhaps infinite, vision that we have all enjoyed.

We thank you for coming back ‘home’. We thank you for bringing the larger world with you, as you always do wherever you are.

This Book of Letters is our heartfelt thanks and gift to you.

Margaret Hamilton, September 2014
The inbox at Turning Point, early 2014
A Giant in a Closet

Robin’s room awakes
The whole world in paper-drifts:
Hot tea and Werthers

His door is open
Big and small questions enter:
The daylight floods out

Hallway in twilight
Fingers tap, Robin whistles:
The doves dance for you

Kerstin Stenius, 2006
Robin, wearing his KBS gift kilt, and Ron Roizen, at the Montreal KBS 20th anniversary meeting. Are they learning kilt lore or trying a Scottish dance?
Concepts of Alcohol and Drug Problems

Robin: ‘The concept of alcoholism as a disease has always intrigued me, and in 1978 I filed my PhD thesis on different ways of looking at drinking problems. It lifted the corner of the carpet on what the police, church leaders, MDs treating diseases, moralists and society as a whole believed about alcoholism, and how these different views overlapped or collided. I have been critical of alcoholism concepts, but I (and I hope future generations of alcohol researchers) take these concepts seriously and want to explore how they can be better understood and reframed. One of the papers I am working on now, Addiction: the Dance between Concept and Terms, continues to reframe this concern.

‘We didn’t know it at the time, but all of our work in Berkeley\(^1\) added up to an effort to disaggregate “alcoholism” into “alcohol problems”. We were working in a world where only alcoholism was studied, and it was studied as if every alcoholic had the same set of symptoms and experiences. Post-WWII alcohol research had been limited to studies of AA members or patients in hospital treatment. Our work showed that many other people had alcohol problems and that their experiences differed widely. The implications for alcohol policies were complex, as were the new demands of measuring all the differences. We were trying to change the general population’s and the media’s fixed notion that if you were talking about any alcohol issues, you had to mean alcoholism, rather than alcohol problems or drinking practices. In a way, all my work has contributed to this ongoing effort.’

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\(^1\) By ‘in Berkeley’ Robin means work done primarily by Genevieve Knupfer, Walt Clark, Selma Monsky, Ron Roizen and himself on the California Drinking Practices Study, which was led by Genevieve Knupfer from 1960. In 1968 they became the Social Research Group led by Don Cahalan, and eventually the Alcohol Research Group, which is now fifty years old and was led by Robin between 1977 and 1991. Directors since then have been Raul Caetano, for three years, and after that Tom Greenfield.

‘We all stand on the shoulders of our colleagues. It is a rare scholar who can recite the pedigree of every idea or turn of phrase in his or her armamentarium. I can only indicate those who have been especially helpful in a direct sense and within my faulty memory. Two names especially come to mind—Harry G. Levine and Robin Room. Both in their own writings and in friendships across the past twenty years their enthusiasm for ideas and their own work in alcohol studies have been sources of provocative insights. My informal association with the Alcohol Research Group has always been extraordinarily beneficial to me. They have listened to my colloquies without obvious boredom and have provided library facilities and, through Andrea Mitchell, librarian extraordinaire, helped to find the right materials. In addition to the three staff members just cited, I am particularly indebted to Patricia Morgan, Ron Roizen, Richard Speiglman, Susanna Barrows, Walter Clark, Connie Weisner and Denise Herd, both for conversation and for their own work.’

‘The nineteenth century saw alcohol peeping out from behind every social problem.’

I heard Robin Room say that, almost in passing, in a lecture at Berkeley in the fall of 1974, forty years ago. I doubt that anybody else there even noticed that he said it, but to me it was a revelation. It also turned out to be a perfect summary of a very big but neglected historical story. I have no idea what else Robin talked about that day, but in some significant ways I have built an entire career as a sociologist and historian on that sentence from Robin. It was the first time I ever heard him give a talk and probably the first time I met or saw him.

So I’d like to thank Robin for that sentence—and also for the more than a zillion following sentences over the next six years, some of them at one or two in the
morning in the offices of a soft-money research shop that pioneered sociological surveys of drinking practices. But let’s briefly return to that distinctive sentence because it captures the dazzling qualities of mind and imagination that made Robin so exceptional even then, to a handful of us, and over the years to so many, many more.

First, there is that verb ‘peeping’. It’s still an unlikely and unusually playful verb to be found in such a sweeping historical and cultural generalisation. But there it is, right in the middle, itself peeping out from behind the first part of the sentence.

Second, there is something slightly devilish, or impish, or subversive, and even kind of funny, in saying that people believed they saw alcohol (of all things) peeping out from behind something else. The sentence leaves open the possibility that people in the nineteenth century were perhaps imagining things, exaggerating them. But because they believed what they saw, they acted on it, said Robin. They built a major social movement, devoted to convincing many others to abstain from any alcoholic beverage at all, including wine and beer, that ultimately led to national alcohol prohibition in the United States. In short, this was not minor league peeping. This was a really big deal. And Robin got us to see that by beginning with that devilish sentence.

Third, because that sweeping sentence and description was in fact true, it allows us to see that by the early 1970s Robin had figured out his own broad historical and cultural understanding of alcohol in modern culture. Further, he had so fully incorporated that understanding into his own intellectual framework that he could produce such a perfect, clever sound bite in his own odd vernacular. In short, forty years ago, and obviously long before that, Robin was a natural intellectual: brainy, talented, endlessly curious, willing to be devilish, subversive and funny, and was already deeply knowledgeable, especially about questions of alcohol and drugs in history.

When I heard that sentence, I was twenty-nine, he was a few years older, and we both happened to be graduate students in sociology at Berkeley. More than anything or anyone at Berkeley, faculty or student, those zillion conversations with Robin over about six years shaped what I still know, think, believe, understand and even what I still do as a researcher, scholar and writer about alcohol and other psychoactive drugs in the modern world. Though he may be embarrassed by my saying this, in the 1970s I fairly quickly became a Robin Room–style sociologist and historian of alcohol and drugs, which I continue to be to this day.

Yes, I am a Roomian drug researcher. In the later part of the 1970s I did research and writing that he broadly wanted to see done. He shifted funds from grants for other things to help support me doing that research and writing, and he enthusiastically cheered and egged me on. For example, while on the payroll I wrote an article that basically consisted of collecting and listing, in alphabetical order, all the slang words for ‘drunk’ in American English, for which there are more than any other
word or concept. Robin thought that was a completely appropriate thing to do on shop time and sought out people in other countries to make similar lists in their languages. I think he convinced someone in Finland to do it.

In contemporary academic terms, Robin was a social constructionist: he understood, viewed and wrote about social issues, problems and phenomena with the absolute understanding of one who knew that human beings make this stuff up. In fact, he was thinking and writing about the social construction of alcohol and drug problems before social construction was cool, or even before anybody called this kind of work social constructionism.

But Robin was also empirical; he counted things, used survey and quantitative data, and worked with very large data sets. He had immense respect for what one Berkeley sociologist called the ‘obdurate’ character of the real world, and therefore, if one looked closely, its somewhat predictable character. Robin cared, for example, that people who were drunk indeed got clumsy and drove their cars into trees, injuring or killing themselves and others. He also could talk to bureaucrats in state capitals and Washington D.C. and convince them that they could learn things of use to them from the social research that he and his colleagues did. I still regard his ability to get research money from bureaucratic stones as magic of a particularly high sort.

The Robin I met and worked with in the 1970s was of course a political liberal or progressive, a welfare state socialist. But unlike many such people, he was also a strong supporter of civil liberties and civil rights and very much acted on those values and commitments. He was moved by and in the social and political movements of the 1960s—in the hot-bed of Berkeley, California, I remind you. He truly was and is what the Europeans call a ‘sixty-eighth’— one who participated and believed in the grassroots democratic movements of that era.

Robin was not alone in this broad sociological and political perspective within the office, which included, over the years, Ron Roizen, Walt Clark, Genevieve Knupfer, Richard Bunce, Jerome Himmelstein, Connie Weisner and Craig Reinarnan and many others. But Robin was probably more politically aware and committed than most. In the early 1970s he was first among equals in the office, and by 1978 we had collectively installed him as the director.

There was also broad agreement in the shop about policies that for over forty years in the United States and other Western countries have been deeply contentious and fiercely fought about. Robin (and the rest of us, once we thought about it) concluded, for example, that marijuana should be legalised, that heroin addicts should be able to get heroin or, if they prefer, methadone, that people should not be jailed for possessing and using currently illegal drugs, and that there was way too much hysteria about illegal drugs—this was before the Reagan–Bush rejuvenation of the War on Drugs in the mid-1980s.

In short, although Robin has moved in his career very much in a public health professional and academic world, from the beginning he was deeply aware of,
sensitive to and wary of the coercive power of the state. Early on he was an advocate of policies that would later be called ‘harm reduction’, meaning policies that reduce the potential harmfulness from using psychoactive drugs without necessarily reducing drug use. In the early 1970s, Robin was suggesting with a completely straight face, often to startled government staff and academics, that one way to reduce injuries from public drunkenness would be to create what he repeatedly called ‘rubber sidewalks’. Sometimes people are going to fall down when they are drunk, he reasonably pointed out. So Robin proposed that instead of treating all those broken bones and injuries after the falls, street construction materials could make the falls less likely with, yes, rubber sidewalks.

Robin’s observations and policy suggestions regularly produced jaw-dropping responses from people, but nobody could rebut the combination of smart cost-benefit analysis and humane public policy. It is true that few could imagine a world in which rubber sidewalks would be built with taxpayer funds. But that never bothered Robin. He liked being intellectually provocative with data and arguments. He liked provoking people to think creatively, imaginatively and even playfully.

As far as I can see, he has not really changed any of this—not his core beliefs about good research and scholarship, not his political values and ideals, not his broad understanding of the place of alcohol and other drugs in the modern world and in human history, and certainly not his sense of humour and pleasure in making people think. And because he figured out very early that the nineteenth century saw alcohol peeping out from behind every social problem, he was well prepared to understand and make sense of a late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century world that saw cannabis and other drugs also peeping out from behind a range of social problems. He understood well that prohibition was a terrible policy, and that ending prohibition would eliminate some problems but certainly not others.

As I was writing this letter, The New York Times published a major editorial titled ‘End Prohibition, Again’, beginning a five-part series on cannabis prohibition and legal regulation. I don’t think it is a coincidence that one of the first newspapers to recognise the importance of that editorial and report on it was The Sydney Morning Herald.

The combination of Robin’s brains and talents, and his unusual biography and background—especially his Australian origins—helped prepare him well for dealing with the modern world and its drinking and drug practices. Yes, we increasingly live in a world Robin saw long before most anyone else. Which helps explain, I suppose, his lifetime of amazing achievement and influence. In effect, from very early on he possessed a kind of cheat sheet that he had created and which he has patiently taught to the rest of us, over and over and over.
Caro Clark  
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA  

Robin has supervised my thesis in the history of treatment for alcoholism, so perhaps it makes sense that I’ve noticed this in Robin’s history. I must be one of his most recent PhD students.

The other day, looking up references for final editing, I was reading his thesis and noticed his acknowledgement of his own supervisor (Don Cahalan), where he wrote of Don’s ‘unfailing helpfulness and courtesy. His leadership made possible the environment in which this and many other intellectual enterprises were able to flourish’. Robin could have been writing about himself as a leader: enormously generous intellectually, curious and indeed unfailingly helpful and courteous no matter how busy. He is the consummate thesis whisperer: he’d drawn it out of me before I could see it myself.

Peter Ferentzy  
TORONTO, CANADA  

Robin helped my career in so many ways that an exhaustive list of the things he did would be cumbersome. He also had a unique mind, containing more knowledge about addiction than probably anyone else’s in the field. I recall how in the 1990s, when Robin was on my dissertation committee, he knew something about practically everything. I would ask a question of Robin and, without referring to any notes or books, he would have something to say. Occasionally I would ponder how much information this man could keep in his head all at once. Then I would shake my own head and think: ‘Peter, you’re lucky you’ve got looks’.
More than Just a Tea-length Conversation

I’ve always felt as though I unintentionally, or to be honest, largely unintentionally, rubbed Robin the wrong way. When Robin was my boss’s boss (or perhaps my boss’s boss’s boss) at the Addiction Research Foundation in the 1990s, he invited me to his office to chat about my latest scheme to torture an epidemiological survey for clinical research goals. Upon arriving, Robin offered me a cup of tea in a very sociable manner. My response was, ‘Will this be a tea-length conversation?’ I now imagine steam coming out of Robin’s ears while he took a breath and informed me calmly that yes, this would be a tea-length conversation.

While I still wince at my manners, I treasure this memory because it illustrates so many wonderful things about Robin. The fact that he would make time to talk to a junior researcher about a crazy idea. His patience in dealing with my social awkwardness. The gift he provided as a senior person who used his influence to facilitate the research careers of those around him without thought for his own gain.

I’ve continued to benefit from Robin’s input over the intervening years. He has certainly irritated me on a number of occasions, but I know I’ve irritated him on many more. Throughout, though, there has been a common goal to try to understand addictions and to appreciate the contributions that different research perspectives can make.

Thanks, Robin.
As with many other researchers in the field of alcohol and social science, we were both lucky early in our careers to encounter the Kettil Bruun Society and its annual symposia.

Karin first encountered KBS international researchers at a conference in Oslo, Norway, in 1988. It was in some ways an odd conference. Getting lost in the program, she did not know where the interesting discussions were taking place. She suffered through an exotic presentation titled ‘The Story of a Dry Man in a Wet World’ and another, ‘Salvation for the Many’. But then she managed to find a more scientific session where a bunch of papers from Berkeley students, led by a certain Robin Room, were discussed. That was Karin’s first encounter with Robin and Gretchen (who knitted in the back of Robin’s sessions but took an active part in discussions over meals), and also Kim Bloomfield and others from Berkeley. Later Karin had the privilege of collaborating with Robin at meetings of the International Collaborative Study of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Gender, Alcohol and Culture: an International Study projects.

Anders’ first contact with Robin was in 1986 when Robin appeared at a national conference on alcohol problems in Stockholm. Robin was invited on Anders’ initiative to give a presentation on the disease concept of alcoholism, so Anders was responsible for picking Robin up at the central station when he arrived. To some extent this first face-to-face meeting was a bit surprising for the young Anders, who was anticipating a meeting with the world-famous scholar, but Robin’s exterior was anything but the traditional tweed-wearing professor. Maybe not a hippie, but very relaxed and Californian, he was carrying a backpack as big as himself while smiling with a friendliness that could have been born in the summer of love.

June 1987. Anders attended his first meeting with Robin and the others at the Kettl Bruun Society in Aix-en-Provence. When Anders came home, he shared with his fellow PhD students the spectacular experience of this week-long meeting, which had been like a community or fellowship, with presentations and discussions, all in plenary sessions, everyone active and taking part in ways that were friendly and scholarly at the same time.

Two years later. Maastricht, Netherlands. Karin was nervous, participating for the first time in a KBS symposium. The time for her presentation was set in the plenary: Friday morning. Lousy timing, Karin thought, as it was the morning after the conference dinner and outing for most participants. But this wasn’t the case—not at all. This conference was not like other ones. Friday morning came, the room was full
of people, it even seemed they’d read the paper! Two curious men posed the most questions: Robin Room and Klaus Mäkelä. The icons. The idols. Karin was, of course, deeply honoured. We were all spoiled by the exceptionally productive atmosphere at these symposia.

Many years later. No one thought Robin would actually be interested in taking up a position in Sweden. When it turned out he was, no one thought he and Gretchen would actually move to Stockholm. But they did. We were amazed! Robin and Gretchen found a great apartment in the city centre. Robin took on the demanding challenge of building the new research institute at Stockholm University: SoRAD, the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs. Robin led SoRAD during the institute’s heyday. The impact SoRAD had on funding and international exchange but also on international recognition of alcohol and drug research cannot be emphasised enough.

Anyone who has any insight into Robin’s most important and persistent personal characteristics will immediately agree that he is a person most unsuitable for retirement. His well-known encyclopaedic knowledge of the research field, but more importantly his passion for it, makes it impossible to even imagine that he will one day withdraw. Unfortunately, it was his age that led Robin to leave Sweden, as presently it is very difficult for a university professor in Sweden to work beyond the age of sixty-seven. Although his repatriation to Australia was a great loss for us here in the North, we are at the same time more than happy to stay in touch by reading what he writes, be that his numerous articles or his postings on the KBS list.

Anja Koski-Jännes

HELSDINKI, FINLAND

Walking with Robin

My first memory of Robin is still clear in my mind’s eye. I had just started to work at the Social Research Institute for Alcohol Studies in Helsinki and heard that there would be an international alcohol research meeting at Vuoranta on the outskirts of the city. Since it was close to my home, I decided to go and take a look at what was going on. I arrived after the meeting had started and there in the front of the room was a desk at which I saw two figures acting as the chairman and the speaker at the session. One of them was Klaus Mäkelä, who worked at the same institute as me, but the other one, with black bushy hair, was totally unknown to me. The first thing that came to mind was: ‘Well, that guy must have been some sort of student leader
in Berkeley’. And so it proved!! Robin had that air about him: a sort of positive, enthusiastic energy, unmistakeable self-confidence and an ability to express his thoughts in clear and lively words that just naturally attract attention wherever he goes. Something about him also hinted of a liberal west coast US campus. After this first encounter we met several times because Robin seemed to enjoy his visits to Finland, and especially his friendship with Klaus. In my photo album there is a picture of us all in Nuuksio, a large natural park close to Helsinki, where we all went hiking. During those visits I also came to know Gretchen and I remember several lovely dinners with Robin, Gretchen and my Finnish colleagues in Helsinki. We also met at many Kettil Bruun Society conferences and meetings in different countries.

Our contact was renewed when Robin was in charge of research at the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto. I had applied for a research position there, and to my surprise I got the job, even though there were some excellent candidates from the United States. Later Robin accidentally let slip that one reason they chose me was that my salary meant I was a cheaper choice than the Americans. Ha! So much for my so-called ‘competence’!

So Robin was now my boss for my busy years of 1996–98 at ARF. One fond memory of that time is of Christmas 1996 when Robin and Gretchen invited my whole family over for Christmas dinner. We felt that this was such a generous act, especially for us Finns, who tend to regard Christmas as an exclusively family celebration.

The years in Toronto were an exciting experience for me. However, a big blow came in 1998. Due to downsizing, our research institute was combined with the psychiatric institute in the next building. The glorious story of ARF was finished, and the Center for Addiction and Mental Health was born. The ugly thing about that merger was that Robin, who was the most well-known and productive researcher in ARF, lost his job because the head of CAMH wanted a psychiatrist in charge of research. Along with that decision several other ARF researchers decided to leave, and so did I.

I still remember our private going-away party for Robin at our house in Bloor West Village in the summer of 1998. If I remember correctly the only guests were Robin, Gretchen and Norman and Esther Giesbrecht. Instead of showing bitterness for the injustice, Robin appeared as optimistic as always. We had a great evening and laughed a lot.

All through the years I have had great admiration for Robin: for his energy, intelligence, vast knowledge of our field of research, great sense of humour, friendliness and generosity.

I am also grateful to Robin for supporting my research endeavours. It has always been a great joy to meet him in the many joint KBS meetings in different countries. Particularly memorable for me were the ones in Padova, Edinburgh and Reykjavik. Padova was such a lovely city and our group was still rather small, something like sixty people or so. In Edinburgh we bought a kilt for Robin. For the KBS conference
in Reykjavik I collected the first KBS song book as I knew that on our afternoon bus trips people always wanted to sing but could never remember the words. That was the first KBS dinner where groups spontaneously began to sing the songs from their home countries. That night Robin loved having his chance to sing with the Americans, Canadians and Australians.

By now his repertoire of home countries is even larger. Spiritually, it surely encompasses the world.

**Ron Roizen**

WALLACE, IDAHO, USA

I worked with Robin at the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley from the early 1970s to 1991, when we both left the group, albeit for different reasons. My first exposure to the group’s research occurred while it was still under Genevieve Knupfer’s direction. I remember being taken aback by the group’s banks of codebooks, their great thickness, and the enormous care that had obviously been taken in constructing the various scales, indexes and scores they contained. Those codebooks said this group was genuinely committed to the belief that answers to important questions could be squeezed out of survey data if enough energy and precision were devoted to the enterprise.

It didn’t take long to discover that Robin—even back in the early 1970s—had an encyclopedic command of the alcohol literature. He was also always very generous to others with his time and thought, suggesting sources to read as he plucked them off of the ARG library shelves. In those days, Robin wrote out his manuscripts in longhand, with a very readable and agreeable handwriting. He also kept his citations from the literature copied out individually on narrow strips of paper, also handwritten, thus available again and again for use whenever a narrative needed them. It always seemed to me that he wrote final drafts in his first drafts; in fact, it was rare to see corrections or scratched-out words in one of Robin’s handwritten texts. This, perhaps inevitably, was a source of no little envy in me—and perhaps other researchers on our staff whom Robin also asked to read his writings in progress.

Though Robin was warmly generous with his time in relation to suggestions for researching a problem or question, he was remarkably cryptic and brief in his comments on draft work that I and others asked him to look over. These would be returned with one- or two-word comments—either ‘Looks good’ or ‘Needs work’. Maybe this parsimony on his part was one of the ways he expressed his fundamentally
democratic disposition towards colleagues and their work. In other words, it reflected his disinclination to impose his own tastes on an in-progress text or analysis, preferring that colleagues retained the full measure of their intellectual liberty. I don’t know. Still, it often left some of us wondering, ‘Well, yes, but what else might he have been thinking?’

Not surprisingly, Robin’s command of the literature, his fluent and agreeable prose and his mastery could be intimidating. I remember thinking that it took some of the grad students who’d acquired one of the Alcohol Research Group research fellowships several weeks, sometimes even longer, to overcome their first exposures to Robin’s research erudition. The size of ARG’s impressive research library could also be intimidating. (I wondered from time to time if, when they walked through the library door for the first time, they muttered to themselves: ‘You mean all these books are about alcohol?!’)

Regarding Robin’s well-known generosity, let me quote the following from the Acknowledgements section of my dissertation:

Robin Room, a reading member of my committee, has been my colleague and friend at the Alcohol Research Group (ARG) for twenty years, during which time it has been my honor and great good fortune to have him serve as my main guide and teacher in the mysterious world of alcohol studies. Robin has also provided an important scholarly model—of indefatigable energy, scholarly generosity, and graceful prose.

The words still ring as true to me today as they did two dozen years ago when I wrote them.

I learned a number of things from Robin that have stayed with me ever since. One was not to be overly critical, pessimistic or grumpy about survey data. Survey data were, to be sure, not everything a scientist could wish for, but they were also the data we had to work with and thus we had an obligation to make the best use of them we could. Or, in other words, starting out with a kind of nihilistic attitude towards the data got us nowhere. This was an important lesson. I also learned from Robin the value of trying to turn assumptions about a scientific territory—sometimes buried or tacit assumptions—into empirically researchable questions.

Relatedly, Robin was always a fan of research experiences that disconfirmed or even surprised a researcher’s expectations. Negative or unexpected findings, he used to suggest, showed that the research process was doing the job it was supposed to do—namely, testing ideas and hypotheses. I’ve always suspected that Robin’s background in the humanities—he has a Masters degree in English—was his ace-in-the-hole in conveying his scientific work after he switched to sociology.

Robin, for all his leadership skills, was also very comfortable as a team player. Perhaps one of the indictors of this willingness to not always be the standout or the star was his longtime participation in a volunteer choral group in Berkeley, where every voice joins in the collective sound and harmony.
As a student of E.M. Jellinek’s work and life, it has occurred to me from time to time that Robin may well be our generation’s alcohol-and-drug-science ‘Jellinek’. Hans Olav Fekjaer may have been onto something when he suggested that the Jellinek Memorial Award should be re-christened the ‘Robin Room Award’. Incidentally, I certainly don’t envy the one or more future grad students who tackle Robin’s thought and writings as their dissertation topic; they’ll have a mountain of reading before them and a lot of careful thought to decipher.

Truth be told, I was not a great fan, nor am I now, of the way alcohol sociology became transformed by the public health model that Robin and others have so ably constructed and advocated since the mid-1970s. But neither was I ever in a position where I had to look out for the interests of the alcohol and drug research community as a whole. And so, perhaps, the shift towards the public health model was more or less a historical inevitability. Whatever the case, Robin’s work, his writings and his thought were and always have been worth careful reading and close study. He also wrote things that surprised me. The breadth of his knowledge and the decades he has cheerfully committed to this research and scholarly territory, combined with that magical pen of his, have, in time, established him as the authoritative and wise voice of a broad scientific community. I have no doubt this is as it should be.
Robin, Bea Treiman, Don Cahalan and Ron Roizen at the Bonita Ave office in the early days of SRG-ARG
Drinking Practices and Drinking Problems

Starting with the California Drinking Practices Study

Robin: ‘In 1963 I lucked into a summer job, advertised for a social science graduate student, on the first study to look at drinking practices in the general population. My two-month stint has turned into fifty years of fascination with the questions posed by looking at alcohol in this way.

‘It soon became clear that alcohol research as a social science field was quite marginalised, but on the other hand alcohol researchers had the freedom, and difficulty, of approaching their data as a sociologist, a physician, a psychiatrist (fortunately our project director, Genevieve Knupfer, was all three of these), an epidemiologist, an economist, a criminologist, an anthropologist, a political scientist, a social historian, a biologist, a pharmacologist, a psychologist, a geneticist, a public health advocate, an international lawyer, and more. Alcohol studies inevitably lead you into all these fields and force you to gain understandings and expertise in each of them.’
Dear Robin,

*Paperboy and choir boy*
*Postmodern and Dickensian*
*Critically empathetic*
*Delighted by the world*
*Pétillant!*

*Whistling the world on*
*Gently catalytic—stirring*
*Like Aesop—many stories*
*Enlightened but how humbly so*
*Insouciant!*

*Pencilled copperplate, article skyscrapers*
*Loving grammarian*
*Profound contender*
*Welder of caring intellectuals*
*Tally ho! Courage! Thank you!*

You really are very many things to all of us. It is impossible to thank you enough for all your support and encouragement. I have been deeply privileged to have been able to work with you.

Thank you,

Anne-Marie
Moira Plant

BRISTOL, ENGLAND, and EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

OK, short and sweet:
At the Millennium we discussed the idea of setting up an archive for alcohol work
and for the Kettil Bruun Society—until we realised we already had one. It was
Robin! I can’t think of anything that shows as well how important and pivotal he is in
our field.

Kari Poikolainen

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Robin and My Life Beside the Photocopier

I always overestimated my reading capability and knew that learning by heart was
difficult for me. This led to copious copying of scientific publications, careful archiving
and a vast collection that filled the best part of the upstairs of our two-story house.
The only time I was saved from my copying addiction was when Robin was in
Helsinki. I just asked him and became enlightened. Oh Robin, why did you not stay
longer in Helsinki?

Nina-Katri Gustafsson

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Most of us know Robin as a great alcohol and drug researcher. As a result of his
Protestant work ethic and working late into the night, the number of his academic
publications far exceeds what others only dream of. Unlike many other scholars, he
has not limited himself to a narrow research area but rather seems to have been involved in most aspects of this research field. But I did not intend to write about Robin as a great researcher, although that is also how I perceive him. When I think about Robin it is first and foremost with a feeling of warmth. Even though I would not describe him as emotional, he always seems to have his heart in what he does. He carries out his work with a passion and, while he is industrious when it comes to his own work, he also reaches out with a helping hand to those who need it.

When I first started to work at the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs, where Robin was head of department and where we met, I was luckily unaware of his greatness, since this would probably have been intimidating. Since my office was across the corridor from his, it soon became obvious to me how much he helped other people in their work by commenting on drafts or helping with translations.

When I began working on the Nordic Tax Study, of which Robin was the project leader, I was still a bit surprised that he took time to listen to me, the most junior person on the project, who, frankly, did not know much at that time. He listened to everyone equally. This made me dare to speak more and it also pushed me to take the research a bit further. My impression is that Robin has had this kind of impact on others as well. He was always the first to cheer us on, or rather to exclaim ‘Courage!’ For me, Robin is still a true inspiration to academic achievement, but even more, he is an inspiration regarding how to treat colleagues with respect and encourage more junior researchers to challenge themselves.

**Klara Hradilova (Selin)**

*STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN*

It is impossible to forget Robin Room once you have had the honour of being a part of his research team. He was my adviser when I wrote my PhD thesis in Stockholm in the mid-2000s and I am infinitely grateful for the inspiration and support he gave me. I will carry it with me for the rest of my career. His personality would shine through in any context. He immediately attracts your attention by combining intellectual clarity with humility in whatever he says or does. In my view, he was and is the world’s number one alcohol researcher—with research contributions the frequency and quality of which would be difficult to match.
One of many strong personal memories I have of Robin, and something I am sure I share with many of my colleagues, is the way he stored so much written material on his work desk. You could hardly see him behind all the piles of paper. It is hard to describe the picture for those who never saw this phenomenon. There are many devoted academics who spread a kind of creative mess around them, but Robin was number one even in this regard. And yet, though it certainly looked like one, it never really was a mess. Most incredibly, whenever you asked him—‘Robin, do you know where I could find the paper on xx by xx from 19xx?’—he would reach out and pick it up from the middle of one of those piles.

Robin, you are in every way one of a kind and I always think of you with a smile and with great respect. Congratulations and cheers!

Sarah Callinan

Melbourne, Australia

Dear Robin,

I really had no idea what to expect when starting at the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research and I feel incredibly lucky to have ended up working in such a supportive environment where so much gets done—it is definitely a reflection of you and how you work. I certainly didn’t expect to have a boss as influential and important as you, nor one happy to throw on a bright orange T-shirt to cheer on his staff’s beginner-grade lunchtime netball team in their Grand Final.

I think the thing that I have been most grateful for is how hard you work to ensure that your colleagues are acknowledged for their work, and how happy you are to try to deflect recognition of all the amazing work you do. I’m not sure if you will be able to deflect in your usual way all the accolades surrounding your remarkable work and career during the Festschrift, but I’m looking forward to seeing you try!

Sez

P.S. Keep fighting for every piece of paper in that office. It’s amazing.
I first met Robin when I was conducting a state-funded longitudinal student survey at Washington State University between 1978 and 1980—Robin pointed me to a postal version of the graduated frequencies drinking pattern measure used in the Alcohol Research Group’s San Francisco and Marin County postal surveys, which I incorporated into my WSU postal surveys. We were again in touch when I obtained my first small grant in 1982 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism ‘alcohol abuse prevention strategies in campus living groups’, an evaluation of WSU’s somewhat unique alcohol policies. One thing led to another and I did a sabbatical at the Alcohol Research Group in 1986 where, going above and beyond, Robin secured me a research associate position at Berkeley’s School of Public Health—good for my budding career in alcohol studies.

Memorable to me was the intellectual ferment that Robin had so much to do with creating at ARG, with its weekly seminars and the chance to rub shoulders with eminent scholars, postdocs who have gone on to illustrious careers themselves, and international visitors alike. This climate, and not a little ARG’s world-class library that Andrea Mitchell built with Robin’s enthusiastic support, led directly to my first two substantial alcohol publications based on student data. This period in the Bay Area also fostered lasting connections for me with the UCSF Department of Psychiatry, while my wife, Nancy Wallace, did her six-month sabbatical with economists at Berkeley, leading to her later career in the Business School there. Once we ‘paid back’ our sabbatical time spent at WSU we wasted little time in relocating to the East Bay permanently. Albeit with some job-related detours, I made my way back to ARG just as Robin announced his departure to become vice-president for research at Toronto’s Addiction Research Foundation.

In the six months we overlapped, Robin and I wrote several joint papers based on the National Alcohol Survey, which was an act of generosity on his part, since he did the same with a number of the scientists he left behind, jump-starting publications from the new survey and helping our recently refunded national centre get off with a bang in its new funding cycle. Not surprisingly, Robin paved the way for other mutual enterprises, getting me nominated and appointed to the Board of the International Council on Alcohol and Addiction in the early 1990s, for example, and continuing on other joint projects I was directing under ARG or centre auspices. I remember when I was briefly the Director of the Institute of Epidemiology and Behavioral Medicine (in which ARG sat during the ’80s and early ’90s) that Robin came halfway around the world from a European meeting to be in San Francisco for
one day when NIAAA did a surprise ten-year audit of the books, just in case he might be needed (in fact he was not; we passed with flying colours).

I give this as an example of his deep sense of loyalty and willingness to go above and beyond, not only in the good times but, as in this case, in crunch times. For too many years to count, Robin has consulted gratis to ARG’s centre and to numerous independent grants, many of which he collaborated on and co-authored very actively. In some small ways it has been my pleasure to return these many favours, as when writing a testimonial for Gretchen and Robin’s partnership for Australian immigration once they moved on from Stockholm to their new life in Melbourne. Nancy and I, after all, could readily testify that we had known them together for several decades! With so many shared good times, many delightful meals and memorable celebrations in northern California, Stockholm, Sydney and lately Melbourne under our belts, we hope for many still to come!

Jake Najman

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

It was 1978 and I was on my first-ever overseas study leave at the Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Boston University. Norm Scotch was the head and had an established reputation as a leading US scholar. He worked closely with Ralph Hingson (subsequently Head of Epidemiology and Prevention Research at the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism), who had led the department’s alcohol research program. We were discussing a national survey of alcohol use and a request from the US government for an estimate of the number of ‘alcoholics’ in the United States. I recall (this was thirty-five years ago) that Norm and Ralph suggested that we needed to talk to Robin Room about this. They mentioned that he was an Australian working in the United States. By 1978 Robin was an established and leading figure in the study of alcohol and alcohol-related problems.

My stay in the United States was relatively short, and I returned to Australia, periodically noting Robin’s continuing contributions to the literature. Some years ago Robin returned to Australia, and I have since had the opportunity to work with him.

Robin has led the field for over forty years. His publications are the standard works in the field—I routinely advise my students to begin their research by finding out what Robin has available on the topic. Indeed, I do much the same myself. This past week I cited one of his publications when presenting to a parliamentary committee reviewing alcohol policy.
Robin’s distinguished academic and policy contributions have been prominent on the world stage for what feels like forever. The fact that Robin is a great human being as well adds to a corpus of work and effort that is pretty well unique for an Australian alcohol researcher. Robin has made a difference.

Paul Lemmens

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ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Words Mean So Many Different Things …

Without any doubt my world would have looked quite different without Robin having crossed my path. The first time I ever attended an alcohol conference, the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions-Epi Section meeting in Dubrovnik, I was struck by the after-hours heavy drinking of some Scandinavian attenders and laughed at the British Scouts’ campfire sing-alongs. It was then I first heard Robin sing ‘Waltzing Matilda’ in a remarkably good voice. Many occasions were to follow, with the highlight of the evening always the start of the dancing.

It was immediately clear to me that Robin was at the centre of these meetings, and that has not really changed. At the Dubrovnik meeting he became a founding father of the Kettil Bruun Society, an important platform where young researchers are enabled to present their work in a collegial atmosphere. He has helped establish so many academic minds in the field and his interpretation has influenced how the world looks upon what is called, with a twentieth-century twitch, the ‘alcohol problem’. Although his work at the Alcohol Research Group was epidemiologically (health) oriented, I was particularly inspired by his views on problem construction and his socio-historical explanations of how the world has dealt with and attempted to control psychotropic substances.

Robin’s physique and the campaign ‘Heineken Refreshes the Parts Other Beers Cannot Reach’ have led me to jokingly compare him to Humpty Dumpty, who appeared in these ads sitting on the floor with a hole in his head, and then happy again on his wall after having a beer. Robin has a Humpty-like character too, perhaps. Here’s an excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass: “When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.” Robin is clearly a master in using words...
and making them sound good. In the discussions on the word, term or concept of the phenomenon of *addiction*, I find his interpretations indeed clear and useful.

Without a doubt, Robin shaped my career by inviting me to work at the Alcohol Research Group. When I arrived, though, Robin had just left for Toronto. So I sadly missed working with him, and I can only guess what would have happened had he still been there. Along with Tom Greenfield, I took on the work of the warning label grant, conceived by Robin. I took up a qualitative research piece from that, the coverage of the alcohol issue in the press around the introduction of labels in the United States. This was quite a challenge, but very interesting for a Dutchman to learn about American societal dynamics. The results of that analysis were eventually published in the *American Journal of Public Health*. Even in his absence, Robin’s influence continued. I am very grateful to Robin for offering me the opportunity to work in the United States.

One last thing needs to be said about Robin’s character, which respires academic virtues through all pores. His interests are very diverse, which was evidenced in that great library he helped create at ARG—a place one could get lost in, with everything from the original letters to the US Congress on Prohibition to posters depicting Humpty Dumpty in an advertisement campaign: a Fundgrube for all brands of science interested in alcohol issues (and other substances of pleasure), from semiotics to genetics. Times have changed, but the need to collect and keep up a selected archive continues.

**Heineken. Refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach.**

An old advertisement from the Berkeley ARG collection of images
My First Encounter with Robin Room’s Writings

‘Treatment-seeking Populations and Larger Realities’ was the first article by Robin Room I ever read. Klaus Mäkelä was the person who drew my attention to it when we were discussing how best to explain the wave of enthusiasm for the Minnesota model of substance abuse treatment that swept through Iceland in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time I was not familiar with Robin’s work except that I knew he was one of the authors of Alcohol Control Policies in Public Health Perspective, the so-called Purple Book, which came out of the groundbreaking project led by Kettil Bruun in the mid-1970s. But the recommended article was in another book: Alcoholism Treatment in Transition, edited by Griffith Edwards and Marcus Grant (1980). This promising title tallied with Robin’s chapter on the astonishing social change in the United States: at least a twenty-fold increase over thirty-five years in the caseload treated for alcoholism in health institutions.

In this article Robin writes about the issue of estimating the number of alcoholics in a population, i.e. the rhetoric of the hidden alcoholics, and the relationship between a treatment system and those who might need its services. An extensive treatment system had been developed to tackle alcohol problems in the larger society. These ideas of a comprehensive view of all alcohol problems can be traced back to a social movement that came into being in the early 1940s. The ‘governing image’, to use Robin’s concept, of the alcoholism movement was that all alcohol problems of concern to public health policy could be regarded as a manifestation of a single disease entity, alcoholism. Furthermore, the alcoholism movement had not only a governing image but also a plan of action. Robin rather cautiously suggests that his parochial approach might still have relevance for other societies. Truly, it had.

For me this paper was an eye-opener. As I read the article, it became clear that a miniature replica of the American experience of treatment expansion was taking place in Iceland. Most of the characteristics of the American alcoholism movement that Robin noted could be easily recognised in Icelandic society. At the forefront of the American movement were individuals in recovery who were campaigning for a separate alcoholism treatment system in which most of the cost would be paid for by the state, so nearly free of cost for patients, in line with the Nordic welfare model. Recruitment was based on self-definition of need for treatment, but survey estimates of alcohol problems in the general population, which were a novelty at that time, were neglected. With entrepreneurial vigour and enthusiasm, the introduction of the...
Minnesota model in Iceland became a success story similar to the heyday of this burst of alcoholism treatment in the United States.

In his final remarks, Robin wonders why the American alcoholic treatment system and its social ecology have been so little studied. Close to twenty years later in an article titled ‘Research Developments: Progress in Scientific and Clinical Research’, he reflected on the rise of treatment system research and how much might be learned from cross-cultural comparisons of treatment provisions and systems, their history and current patterns. Robin did not only call for comparative studies of treatment systems; his wisdom was to call for comparative studies of alcohol and drug issues in time and across cultures, as well as through collaboration between researchers. I have had the privilege to contribute to books Robin edited, such as *The Effects of Nordic Alcohol Policies*, and was a member along with him of collaborative projects like *Alcoholics Anonymous as a Mutual-Help Movement: A Study in Eight Societies*. Like many others I benefited from Robin’s extraordinary knowledge of alcohol and drug research all over the world and his ability to use his insights in framing research questions and interpreting research results in various societies. My works have benefited from his helpfulness and judgement, which he always practises with kindness. Nevertheless, I have to say that nothing beats the impression of that first eye-opening encounter with Robin’s article ‘Treatment-seeking Populations and Larger Realities’.

**Cheryl Cherpitel**

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA, and VICTORIA, CANADA

Dear Robin,

Over the past thirty-plus years, both as a predoctoral fellow and then as a scientist at the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley, I always found working with you an adventure. Because of your broad knowledge of the field and phenomenal ability to call up from memory the most obscure citation, whatever I had written and you reviewed took on new life and meaning as you commented or re-wrote. It was always a special challenge working with you on a paper—to take your comprehensive expansion of whatever the topic was and then try to narrow it into the required space limitations. (I particularly remember your contributions to the Y90–Y91 paper we wrote.) If I had not affiliated with ARG (then the Social Research Group) as a predoc fellow in the early 1980s, I’m quite sure that my research career would never
have taken off to the extent that it did. You have always been a wonderful mentor and great colleague, not to mention the inspiration for the Kettil Bruun Society tour bus sing-alongs, which will never be forgotten.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Cheryl

Pia Mäkelä

HELSINKI, FINLAND

In 2001, when I spent six months of my maternal leave in Stockholm with my firstborn and husband, I believe I shared with Robin one common aim, in which we both failed miserably.

Robin was working at the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs and I visited SoRAD several times to meet and have lunch with Robin and his colleagues. We also had the good fortune and privilege to be invited to Robin and Gretchen’s beautiful home in Vasastan to enjoy Gretchen’s plentiful and delicious food and meet other new Swedish friends. Our six-month-old son had the wit to behave nicely and sleep almost throughout the dinner in his portable crib in the corner of the dining room, and we were re-invited.

I was determined to return home a fluent Swedish speaker. After all, I had already put in ten years of effort to learn Swedish at school. After the six months, which were mostly spent at home talking only to the baby, who could not yet speak any language, I was left as far from this target of becoming a fluent Swedish speaker as Robin was when he left for Australia.
Dear Robin,

In September 2007 we met at the Melbourne ABC TV studio to team up as the expert side of a television panel debate program about Australian drinking culture. The session was called ‘Alcohol: Our Favourite Drug’ and was hosted by ex-Sixty Minutes journalist Jeff McMullen in front of a live audience. We were joined by two industry people, a senior representative of the Australian Hotels Association and the Head of Communications at Fosters Group.

We got together at your place afterwards with colleague, Paul Dietze, to review the footage as it went to air. Gretchen cooked us all a delicious meal and we watched the show on a small television with fuzzy reception balanced on the kitchen bench. One theme we noted that night was that while you and I were restricted to being advocates for the scientific evidence (as best we could), the industry reps could say whatever they felt like saying—they had no natural boundaries to hem them in, no need to stick to facts. They could freely relate anecdotes, reflect on personal experience, revert to personal opinion and shoddy stunts to endear them to the audience and generally be as creative as their intellects would allow. On the other hand, their basic arguments were predictable: ‘I’m no expert but …’, ‘What we need is less regulation and more education …’, ‘Tax and raising the price of alcohol is old thinking that hurts the majority of moderate drinkers for the sake of a few misfits …’

The other thing we learnt was that television studio spotlights are pitiless and can do brutal things to one’s natural visage. I watched you sit patiently for a solid hour, suffering the enthusiastic ministrations of the backstage make-up artists and thought how useless it was of them to try to smooth away the evidence of years of wisdom and experience with their greasepaint trowel.

There is still evidence of our efforts that memorable night at: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/differenceofopinion/content/archives/doo_20070906.htm>.

Tanya
Dear Robin,

I appreciate being part of the great team at the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research and having the opportunity to work under your supervision. Thank you for your support, guidance, encouragement and the opportunities provided to me after I started my job at CAPR. Before I came there, I had almost no idea about alcohol policy, alcohol control or alcohol-related harms. You guided me step by step and I was shocked by the magnitude and range of impacts that alcohol has in Australia and around the world. I quickly understood the importance of evidence-based research in the alcohol policy and public health fields.

With your and Michael’s supervision, I published my first paper in an alcohol journal last year, ‘Alcohol and Liver Disease in Australia: A Time Series Study’. I still remember how excited I was when the paper was accepted for publication. Eating out with you and listening to your impressive stories has been enjoyable and beneficial for me. One time you told us the smartest investment you had made was buying a house in California using your scholarship funds while you studied for your PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. Can people imagine that? This investment was so smart! No one predicted back then how fast house prices were going to increase during the last two decades in big cities in many parts of the world.

Our netball team has won a number of championships and we are grateful for your support. Showing my gold medals to my family and friends has been one of the proudest things in my life. Also, the coasters you and other colleagues collected from around the world are displayed on my book shelf and now they are one of the coolest gadgets to show off to others.

Lastly, thank you for your guidance and encouragement to me and for many happy memories that I will always treasure.

Jason
Janne Härkönen

HELSINKI, FINLAND

During the 2008 Kettil Bruun Society meeting in Victoria, Canada, I had the pleasure of meeting Robin. But the very first thing I learned from him wasn’t related to alcohol research. On a sightseeing tour to Vancouver Island’s northern parts, Robin revealed his music skills, singing ‘Waltzing Matilda’ into a crackling bus microphone. Eventually the whole bus joined in singing various songs, with various degrees of success. It was a memorable and inspiring moment for a first year PhD student on his first international conference, a warm welcome to the KBS community.

Kim Bloomfield

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Recollections of My Collaborations with Robin

It is an honour to contribute to the festivities and this Book of Letters honouring Robin Room, my mentor, colleague and friend. I first encountered Robin in the spring of 1983 when I was pondering whether to take a course on survey research at the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley. I was a first year Masters student in the behavioural sciences program. The classroom in which the course was held was small and narrow, more suited for seminars. I came a bit late to an overfilled room. Robin had already begun to introduce the course and spoke non-stop with much enthusiasm and detail about the syllabus and very long reading list. The way he talked about the subject made me feel immediately that I would have an awful lot of catching up to do to keep pace with the class. Feeling intimidated, I decided not to take it, choosing instead a seminar on the latest epidemiological developments in the AIDS epidemic.

It was eighteen months later that I personally met Robin. I had just begun my studies as a doctoral student. Again Robin was teaching a course, but this time he was co-teaching it with Pat Morgan, my main supervisor. The course was filled with loads of essential basic information, as well as trivia, given that it was Robin, on alcohol and drug research. It was entitled ‘Just the Facts’, and it was clear that Robin fully enjoyed being an instructor. The lectures were sort of a ‘duo comedic stand-up
team’, with Robin and Pat bantering back and forth about all those facts. For me it was a great introduction to the field.

After that it became clear that I would have a closer academic relationship with Robin. At that time he was director of the Alcohol Research Group and later became co-supervisor of my doctoral dissertation. My main supervisor had grown somewhat distracted (and understandably so) with her upcoming tenure review, so over time I met more often with Robin to keep on track with completing my thesis. You could call this time the ‘Golden Years’ of my collaborations with Robin. It was during this period that he introduced me to the wonderful world of international alcohol research collaboration, from which I have benefited, and continue to enjoy to this day. Robin opened this door by introducing me to a study that had just begun: the International Collaborative Study of Alcoholics Anonymous, which was organised and led by his very close friend the Finnish sociologist Klaus Mäkelä. The project had begun with an organisational meeting at the 1987 Kettil Bruun conference in Aix-en-Provence. I joined the group a year later and attended its first separate week-long meeting in the outskirts of Helsinki at the conference centre in à Vuoranta.

Robin also introduced me to the Kettil Bruun Society, and the first full meeting I attended was in Maastricht in 1989. There was a downside to having Robin as a role model: there was no way that I could read all of the papers before the conference began! I remember trying so hard to do so, but being the slow reader I am, I had to give up. I could not emulate Robin on that count! I would have had absolutely no time for socialising and networking, a vital and beneficial aspect of any conference. In those days every registered participant received a very large and very heavy packet of conference papers. I remember that Robin was stopped at the security line on the return flight to Berkeley and asked to empty his backpack for inspection. I still do not know how he was able to pack not only all of those papers but also about ten additional books he’d bought for the ARG library into that bag!

After my doctoral studies I became a postdoctoral scholar at the Prevention Research Center. The centre was on the other side of campus from ARG, and there was a friendly but healthy rivalry between the two shops. One day Robin stopped by my office to tell me that he was leaving ARG. That was really hard to hear. He had accepted a job in Toronto, at the Addiction Research Foundation. He explained that he had recently turned fifty and did not want to ‘write grants’ for the rest of his life. I suppose one could say those were ‘famous last words’, since he has continued to write very successful grants in every country in which he has worked. It was sad to see him leave the San Francisco Bay Area, but I was by that time immersed in international collaborations and knew I would see him regularly at various current and future collaborative project meetings, including ICSAA, which was still running.

We’ve had quite a few adventures along the way. One was when Robin, Gretchen and I shared a sleeper car on an overnight train trip from Budapest to Berlin after the 1990 KBS conference—a wonderful time to be in Eastern Europe. I was going to
Berlin to visit friends and Robin had another conference to attend. Gretchen had just had a life-changing visit with Unitarians in Transylvania and was already thinking of writing a book about it. With Germany not yet officially reunited, the border police rudely awakened us (we were sleeping in our underwear) at an uncomfortable hour to get us to pay the ‘required’ five West German marks (which they no doubt pocketed). We arrived at the Lichtenberg train station in East Berlin around the unearthly hour of 6am. I claimed that I knew the way to West Berlin, so Robin, against Gretchen’s protests, insisted on taking the U-Bahn rather than a comfortable taxi (remember Robin’s luggage heavy with books and KBS papers). Not only did Robin talk us into public transportation, he then convinced us to walk from the U-Bahn station to their hotel near Wittenberg Platz. I can still see him jollying Gretchen along as she looked longingly at empty taxis passing by. After a couple of wrong turns on my part—my knowledge of the side streets of the Kurfürstendamm was not very good at that time—I finally deposited them at their hotel, with Gretchen very grateful that this latest travelling (mis)adventure was finally over.

These activities with Robin—working meetings, travelling, conference breaks and dinners—have made my participation in such events immensely more enjoyable and memorable than they would have been without him. To have Robin included guaranteed that we would have lively and thought-provoking discussions on whatever the topic might be. If you are lucky enough to sit at the same table with

Working session at 1990 ICSAA meeting, San Rafael, California. From left: Robin, Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl, Pat Morgan and Iikka Arminen (all except Irmgard wearing gifts from Haydée Rozovsky).
him at any conference or meeting dinner, you will be privileged to learn so much on a variety of topics. If the topic has anything to do with the United Kingdom, or Canada, or Sweden, or Australia, a special highlight is for the conversation to detour off into the nooks and crannies of that local history.

The first (and only?) KBS conference that Robin could not attend was in Rüschlikon in Switzerland. As the temporary acting director of ARF he had to stay in Toronto. It was something that I could not imagine ever happening: a KBS meeting without Robin? His absence was so thoroughly noticeable. I think everyone could sense that something was a bit different that year. After Robin moved to work in Canada, he began to wear a coat and tie to KBS meetings! Robin is so thoroughly a child of the 1968 cohort that to see him ‘dressed up’ was a shock.

In addition to his intellectual gifts and contributions to alcohol research and to KBS, Robin adds substantially to the social life behind research work. Having got to know him in Berkeley, and then sharing some overlaps in our international career paths, I have been able to see how well Robin adapts to his host country and how

Conference dinner at the 1996 KBS meeting, Stirling Castle, Scotland. Robin with Sally Casswell
fully he embraces its culture. The best vehicle for expressing that is through his singing, which I believe is his most beloved pastime outside work. No conference dinner national sing-along can be had without Robin participating in the songs for at least one if not multiple nations. And if you are also lucky to be on the same KBS Wednesday afternoon excursion as Robin, he will be one of those in the tour bus leading the singing to and from the excursion site.

I hope that this short essay conveys a sense of what it has been like to have such a welcoming, open and warm-hearted man as a friend, and such an intellectually gifted and knowledgeable man as a mentor and colleague. It strikes me now as I look back that Robin indeed played a decisive role during my early graduate years in my choosing alcohol social epidemiology as my career direction. To have him as a colleague and a friend, and to have had him as a role model in my formative graduate years, has been a true gift.

Sharon Wilsnack and Richard Wilsnack
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA, USA

Dear Robin,

We are sorry that we will not be able to participate in the alcohol policy thematic meeting and the associated celebrations in your honour in Melbourne in September. However, we are pleased to have this chance to share a few memories and words of congratulation and gratitude via this letter.

One of our earliest memories of you is from 1979, when you and Sharon served together on one of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s early review committees (the Alcohol Abuse Prevention Peer Review Committee). We were planning our first national survey of US women’s drinking and you were incredibly helpful in providing advice about survey design, sampling, survey subcontractors, interviewer training and numerous other aspects of survey methodology. Your advice and expertise were greatly appreciated by two aspiring young researchers who had never before conducted survey research—let alone a large national longitudinal survey!

Another early memory is Sharon’s membership of several NIAAA site visit teams that evaluated the Social (and then Alcohol) Research Group’s National Alcohol Research Center in Berkeley during the years you served as its director. Although the quality of ARG’s work was high, and the centre clearly had a near-monopoly on the periodic National Alcohol Surveys on which NIAAA (and the field) depended, one concern was expressed with increasing forcefulness during every site visit: that you
were so busy conducting research and leading ARG that finishing your PhD dissertation tended to be a lower priority. When you did complete your PhD, there was a collective sigh of relief from NIAAA leaders that one of their pre-eminent National Alcohol Centers was now directed by an outstanding scientist who also held the ‘appropriate’ academic credentials.

In more recent years, we have greatly appreciated your many contributions to the international study on Gender, Alcohol and Culture. You have been an active and energetic member from that project’s beginning in 1993 to the present, when GENACIS members are, like you, becoming increasingly interested in cultural and gender-related aspects of research on alcohol’s harm to persons other than the drinker. Your involvement in GENACIS exemplifies, we feel, your genuinely collaborative approach to research. Despite your seniority and worldwide leadership in the alcohol research field, you have consistently participated as an equal partner with all other GENACIS members. You have been extremely generous with your time and expertise—encouraging, supporting and mentoring numerous fledgling researchers and collaborating with many of them on conference papers and publications. In recent years you have been the ‘harms to others guru’ for the GENACIS group, helping members appreciate the important cultural and gendered aspects of conceptualising and analysing alcohol’s harms to persons other than the drinker. We also appreciate your valuable contributions to the GENACIS/Harms to Others R01 research grant application that our group recently submitted to NIAAA. Your leadership was especially helpful in conceptualising potential interactions between national alcohol policies and regional drinking cultures as these may affect the rates, types and severity of alcohol’s harm to others. Investigators on the R01 grant application strongly believe (and we hope that NIAAA will agree with us!) that learning more about the cultural and policy environments associated with higher and lower rates of harms from alcohol can suggest opportunities for prevention and policy approaches that can reduce alcohol’s harms—both to the drinker and to others.

In addition to your innumerable contributions to the alcohol research and alcohol policy fields and your historical and ‘big picture’ perspective on alcohol issues and the world in general, we also treasure many of your less tangible personal qualities: your indefatigable energy and sense of humour; your diplomacy and ability to get sometimes cantankerous or sceptical people to work together toward a common goal; and your creative and thoughtful approach to data analysis and interpretation: you do not just count or describe, you think about why things have turned out the way they have. Our favourite Kettil Bruun Society memories of you include your appearance in a stylish Scottish kilt for the conference dinner of the 1996 KBS symposium in Edinburgh, and your gusto as our group’s song leader during bus rides on multiple KBS excursions.

Robin, we know that you will receive scores of accolades about your exceptional professional and personal contributions during the September celebration in
Melbourne, and they will all be extremely well deserved! We feel very grateful for having had the opportunity to work with you and learn from you over the nearly forty years of our shared committee assignments. We congratulate you on your many outstanding accomplishments and wish you many more years of happiness and productivity.

With all best wishes,

Sharon and Richard

Lorraine Midanik

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

Dear Robin,

I have procrastinated about writing this letter to you because I would much rather thank you in person. Words don’t seem to be enough to express all that you have done for me, and so many others, in launching our careers. I have always been grateful that you have been my ‘safety net’. Whenever I wasn’t sure about a paper or a line of research, you, as usual, listened well and then showed enormous enthusiasm (how do you do it?) about whatever direction I eventually chose to take. Throughout the years, I have been the lucky recipient of many inquiries from researchers around the world who heard about my research from you. In 2004 you made it possible for me and my family to spend a semester in Stockholm, during which time I was able to complete most of my book and several articles. It was a terrific experience for all of us, and I know it wouldn’t have happened without you.

I’m sure there are so many other ways that you have helped me and my career over the last thirty-five years, but suffice it to say that I know my successes wouldn’t have happened without your ongoing support. Thank you, Robin. You are clearly ‘one-of-a-kind’. It is a privilege to know you and to work with you.

Lorraine
Ann Roche

ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

In one’s career there are limited opportunities to meet and work with truly exceptional colleagues, and even more rarely to engage with an individual of whom it can be said ‘he has made a lasting contribution to our understanding and appreciation of his chosen field’. It is with this in mind that I approach the difficult task of penning this brief and inevitably inadequate reflection on your substantial and enduring contribution.

I have always admired the constancy of your commitment to the science of alcohol and your recognition of the importance of both epidemiology and social science in enriching our awareness of the place of alcohol in the lives of individuals and societies. Your detailed understanding of the ebb and flow of alcohol consumption over time and the critical role of culture on consumption is a key contribution.

As you know, Australia has been at the forefront of alcohol-related research and policy innovation. As a fellow Australian, it’s especially pleasing to be able to acknowledge your contribution both nationally and internationally. That you chose to return to Australia to provide leadership and to mentor so many young Australian researchers is a reflection of your commitment, as is your ready willingness to work with many frontline service delivery organisations tackling alcohol misuse on a daily basis.

My own understanding of the richness and diversity of the alcohol field has been very much enhanced by my exposure to your ideas and perspectives. Thank you for all your work in the past, in the present and into the future.

Jussi Simpura

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Robin Room, Global Adventurer, had never feared the problems that may be encountered on travels around the world. Now, he was heading home from a KBS meeting in Krakow, Poland. The country was in the midst of a deep social and cultural change, with the public order not yet fully reshaped after reforms. The skills of pick-pockets were of a high professional level, and backpacks were their favourite target.
Robin did not worry too much about such everyday troubles. He was now waiting for the airport bus in the centre of Warsaw. Robin was travelling with a big, heavy backpack and the other necessary equipment of a Global Adventurer. Noticing his heavy load, some young local guys in a very friendly way offered to help Robin by pushing him from behind up onto the bus. On the way to the airport it was noticed that their help was not completely gratis. They had skilfully picked Robin’s wallet from his back pocket, where it had been readily accessible.

Fortunately, there was plenty of time till the departure of the flight. As an experienced traveller, Robin knew what to do to cancel credit cards, and the loss of cash was not any major concern, either. But there was also Robin’s Green Card in the wallet! Without it, no easy return to the United States! He figured out that an official report on the theft must be made in order to receive an official document that might help in getting back home. But where could he get such a document? He was told that the only place to go was the police station at the airport. It was located a few hundred metres from the main terminal. As it was uncertain which languages might be spoken there, Robin asked a colleague, let us call him Yousseh, to help him.

Yousseh knew that things may not always be easy with officials in some countries. He was also worried about whether his primitive, almost non-existent skills in Polish could be of any help, and feared his rudimentary Russian would not be much better received. Robin and Yousseh walked to the police station, dragging their luggage in the midsummer heat. There, in a small office for the officers on duty, were four policemen at the service of the public. Not one of them spoke English, and the first attempts by Yousseh in Russian were a total catastrophe. But luckily one of the officers was fluent in German, and this solved the problem!

Now, the senior officer who was to sign the official document had a seat in an armchair at the window. One of his younger colleagues was sitting at the desk, ready to fill in the document form in Polish. The German-speaking officer was seated between his boss and Yousseh. Robin took a chair next to Yousseh, and the fourth officer took the role of observer in the back corner. With everyone in their places, the work could be started. The senior officer asked in Polish what the problem was. The German-speaking officer then translated the question into German and Yousseh translated it into English. Robin’s answers travelled the same route back to the senior officer, who nodded to the youngest colleague that he might proceed to type that answer or information on the official form. In less than half an hour, Robin received a most official document with the necessary and impressive stamps, ensuring a safe and easy return home.

The lesson of this adventure is that there is always a solution, if you know what the problem really is. Robin Room, Global Adventurer, had once more proved that success in problem formulation is essential for a successful solution.
Bruun et al., Alcohol Control Policies in a Public Health Perspective (1975, the Purple Book);
Edwards et al., Alcohol Policy and the Public Good (1994, the Blue Book);
Room et al. Alcohol and Public Health in Developing Societies (2002, the Black Book);
Babor et al., Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity (2003, No Ordinary Commodity);
Babor et al., Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity, 2nd edn, (2010);
Babor et al., Drug Policy and the Public Good (2010, the Drug Policy Book).
Robin: ‘Alcohol Control Policies in a Public Health Perspective’ broke so many areas of new ground. We called it the Purple Book and I worked on it in 1974–75. The authors came from five countries and were a motley bunch of sociologists dressing ourselves up as public health experts. It helped immensely to shift the focus of alcohol research away from ‘alcoholism’ to a public health framing of ‘alcohol problems’ because that reframed what alcohol researchers’ work would be and what alcohol policy should be about. It was not only a shift in framing but a refocus on control methods, taxes, hours of sale—the whole world of what is now called “nudge policies”. In 1984 I wrote a review article on the history of this shift for Annual Reviews in Public Health.

‘I can still quote sentences from the Purple Book that sound obvious today, though at the time they were considered revolutionary and, of course, despised by the alcohol industry. For example, “The level of alcohol consumption in a general population affects the level of alcohol problems, and governments should pay attention to it”.

‘Fortunately, our efforts were led by Kettil Bruun—the Swedish-speaking Finn for whom we named the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol after his far-too-early death. Kettil taught us how to work in an across-fields research team. Working on the Purple Book gave me a heady taste for international projects, and I have been involved in and committed to Kettil’s way of working on these international collaborations ever since.’
Rantin’ Rovin’ Robin

by Robert Burns and Tom Babor

A lad in Australie was born,
Whose life was not to be forlorn
‘Twas as if a blast o’ win’
Blew the room in on Robin.

For Robin was a rovin’ boy,
A rantin’ rovin’ rantin’ rovin’,
Robin was a rovin’ boy,
A rantin’ rovin’ Robin.

The gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo’ she, ‘Wha’ lives shall see the proof,
This waly boy will be nae coof;
I think we’ll ca’ him Robin’.

He'll hae misfortunes great and sma’
But aye a heart abune them a’
He'll be a credit tae us a’;
We'll a’ be prood o’ Robin.

But sure as three times three mak’ nine,
I see by ilka score and line,
This chap will dearly like oor kin’
So leeze me on thee, Robin.

When Princeton’s ivy did he find,
‘Twas in English Lit that he did shine.
A boy as smart as his neighbour, Einstein,
That was known as Robin.

Next on to Berkeley did he beseech,
The student guardians of Free Speech,
To stop the University’s war-making sham,
And get the US out of Viet Nam.
So said rantin’ rovin’ Robin.
No longer a student of philology
He switched his hitch to sociology,
And then on that fateful day,
To ARG he found his way.
A kinder, gentler Robin

Ten years and one there laboured he,
Till he earned his PhD,
By mixin’ alcohol and social theorie.
Thus was made Professor Robin

People came from near and far,
To meet this risin’ Bacchanalian star!
He attracted scholars by the dozen,
Including Clark, Fillmore and Roizen.
This was no ordinary Robin

In the hallways they did camp,
And on the Surveyor he placed his stamp.
Such a motley long-haired troop,
Was this Social Research Group,
Led by boy wonder Robin!

Not content to stay at home,
Around the globe he did roam.
To Toronto, Oslo, then Stockholm
And places in between, he was known,
As the gentle Robin we all knew,
Always speaking from the Room with a view.

At each place he left his mark!
Working late ’till it was dark.
Writing emails with a smile,
Stacking his papers in pile after pile,
’Till there was no room for Robin

Nothing he did wanted for success:
From the Purple Book to KBS!

As years went by he grew prolific,
And the papers grew even more terrific!
’Till at ARF they said: ‘What the heck!
He deserves the bust of Jellinek!’
Aye, Bunky would be a proud ’o Robin!
A Book of Letters for Robin Room

And when in Sweden he could work no more,
He flew with Gretchen back to that Fatal Shore,
Wherein the University did him anoint,
To lead a team at Turning Point,
Now known to all as rantin’, rovin’ Robin

May never wicked Fortune tousle him!
May never ICAP bamboozle him!
If drunkenness be the work of culture’s Dishibitionist,
Then virtue is the work of the Neo-Prohibitionist!
The friend of man, the friend of truth;
The friend of age, and guide of youth,
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm’d,
Few hearts with knowledge so inform’d:
If there’s another world, he will live in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.

For Robin was a rovin’ boy,
A rantin’ rovin’ rantin’ rovin’,
Robin was a rovin’ boy,
A rantin’ rovin’ Robin.

Robin and Tom Babor listening to a paper delivered via simultaneous translation
Dear Robin,

On this occasion of the celebration of your many academic contributions to our field, it is my pleasure to join your many friends and colleagues in congratulating you on an illustrious career as a scholar, teacher, mentor and all-round good fellow.

I encountered the name Robin Room in 1983 as a student in Henry Wechsler’s alcohol class at the Harvard School of Public Health. Since then, the name and the many contributions associated with it have not been far from my view. Fifteen years later, in 1998, I had the privilege of meeting you in person and I am sure you will remember the genesis of that meeting. I was attending a conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, and just happened to be in my hotel room when I received a phone call from you (true confession: I had skipped a session to watch Nigeria play in the World Cup). You had come across my little monograph on alcohol in Nigeria and wanted me to re-analyse the data for a World Health Organization multinational project on alcohol epidemiology in developing countries. With me living in Baltimore at the time, the survey materials stored in a locked room in Jos, Nigeria, and you having just moved to Scandinavia, how we managed to retrieve the data and get the work done is a story in itself.

Thanks to you, this project was the beginning of my relationship with the World Health Organization and since then I have benefited directly from you and from your many contributions in various ways. I remember working with you as a WHO staff member to produce the Black Book on alcohol in developing societies, learning a lot from you in the gender and alcohol study, and enjoying the privilege of co-editing the Brown Book that came out of that project.

Robin, you are indeed a rare gem in the alcohol field (trite but true). Your interest in international work, your willingness to help young scholars and your humility are examples for the rest of us to follow. Most admirable are your wide-ranging interests in various aspects of substance use research (spanning epidemiology, social concerns and policy), your vast knowledge of the history of the field, and what seems like everlasting delight in seeking answers to questions that we all continue to grapple with.

Surely, you have influenced our research and policy fields in ways that few academics ever do and all the signs are that we can expect more from you still. May you continue to teach, mentor and touch the lives of many more students and scholars who come your way for as long as you possibly can.

Warm greetings from Nigeria,

Isidore
Sally Casswell
AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

An iconoclast, always interested, always supportive, a formidable memory …

John Strang
LONDON, ENGLAND

I would like to recognise Robin’s substantial contribution. My main work with Robin has been around the preparation of the Blue Book, Drug Policy and the Public Good, to which Robin contributed a very important and distinctive social science and social policy perspective. The process (and the product) would have been very different, and less interesting, without the diversity of perspectives which comprise the crucible in which the book was formed.
Charles Parry

My first meaningful involvement with Robin came with our working together on the Alcohol Policy in Developing Societies initiative in the mid- to late 1990s. This project, initiated largely by Alan Lopez at the World Health Organization, involved work on a global version of what has come to be termed the Blue Book, Alcohol Policy and the Public Good, written by Griffith Edwards et al. A group of us from various countries came together under Robin’s leadership to undertake this daunting task. We met over several years in places such as Mexico City, Bangkok, Delhi and Edinburgh, and it was during working sessions, over meals and on sightseeing trips to Agra, Teotihuacan and so on that I really got to know him.

While working on this project I was exposed to Robin’s breadth of knowledge of the historical literature on various aspects of alcohol, going back to the beginning of the twentieth century and even before that. Robin got us to buy into a framework for the book that evolved over time and he kept copious handwritten notes on our discussions which eventually formed the basis of the book. I have no idea how many examination pads of handwritten notes he must have completed during the course of writing this book, but it must have been dozens. I was also amazed at his capacity to take us back to things we had discussed on previous days (or even at previous meetings held six or more months before) and remember what we had said on a particular issue or even to find his handwritten notes concerning the discussion.

Since the completion of the book around 2001, I have had occasion to connect with Robin on virtually every continent except Antarctica and South America. Often our paths have crossed three or four times a year and we have tended to have breakfast or dinner or both together. I have frequently remarked to my wife that, on an annual basis, I probably have more meals with Robin than I do with my friends back home. Robin has truly been an inspiration to me, and a mentor. I have particularly appreciated the sociological and historical perspectives he has given to the field of addiction.

Thank you, Robin—long may it continue!
It must have been at one of those good-old-days International Council on Alcohol and Addiction conferences that I first met Robin, perhaps even in Vienna, the city where many years later I would settle down after retiring from the World Health Organization. It must have been in the years that Archer and Eva Tongue were at the helm of what at that time was the only serious international NGO platform on alcohol and drugs. It is very tempting to expand on the situation of these days—but this is not the purpose of this note.

I had then just entered the field of the addictions, after having spent a couple of years as a researcher in the illiteracy field in Africa. Entering that conference then, I felt like an illiterate in the addiction field—arriving in a sanctuary where the great addiction scientists and policy makers of the world met and debated.

One of the people who impressed me right away was Robin. It was his way of speaking—as if he were constantly searching his mental archives and files for the fitting bits of research and opinions that existed, cautiously steering towards balanced interpretations and conclusions. It was also his gentleman-like handling of research and political material—however odd—and his respectful approaching of people that impressed me. This, together with his encyclopedic knowledge of the entire field and his readiness to help, has kept me impressed ever since I first met him. It is beyond any doubt that Robin’s outstanding research work and leadership over many years have had a great impact on the addictions field and far beyond on public health globally.

Thus I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to work together with Robin and I’m still grateful to him for his great contributions to activities that I initiated at my time at WHO, such as with Griffith Edwards the development of Alcohol Policy and the Public Good (the successor to the Purple Book and forerunner of Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity, 2003), and the consultation with the alcohol industry at WHO.
To say that Robin Room has been there for me at crucial times during my career would be a huge understatement. Robin was an inspiration to me when I was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, when I would show up at seminars at the Alcohol Research Group. I thought it was so amazing how he would travel off to all corners of the world, doing alcohol research and influencing policy discussions. At some spot in my mind I know I was thinking, ‘I want to be like that’.

The first paper I published on alcohol policy appeared in *Contemporary Drug Problems* under Robin’s editorship. He was always encouraging, even when he hardly knew me.

I first got to work closely with Robin on the *Alcohol Policy in Developing Societies* book project. I talked my way into the project as I had been developing an early version of what would become the Global Information System on Alcohol and Health for the World Health Organization and was doing dissertation research in Malaysia, Zimbabwe and Estonia. I convinced Robin that I had data and insights from which the book would benefit. That project held several meetings over its time span, and I loved sitting in the meetings with Robin, benefiting from his encyclopedic knowledge of alcohol and drug research, and watching him cover page upon page of blank white paper with detailed notes of every presentation and discussion.

That project opened the way to our working together for the World Bank. We were asked by the World Health Organization to help the World Bank develop a ‘note’ on alcohol investments. The bank had already adopted a policy banning investment of bank funds or loans in tobacco production. Robin and I spent an amazing two weeks working together on what turned out to be a forty-two page single-spaced ‘note’ laying out the rationale for why the bank should not invest in alcohol production without taking into account the public health situation in each country regarding alcohol. Robin was in Stockholm at the time and I was in California. We had a very tight deadline—I think we had a week to write it. Robin would work on it for twelve hours then e-mail it to me, and I would work while he slept, and vice versa. I am told by colleagues at the bank that the ‘note’ effectively shut off new investments by the bank in alcohol production. It may be one of the most meaningful things I have ever done.

There was another crucial moment for me with Robin. I was doing a lot of work for WHO as an expert adviser, and the personalities and politics in Geneva were proving very challenging. I met Robin in his hotel room at a conference in Montreal, described the situation and asked what I should do. His response was both realistic and comforting: ‘It’s always like this, David. Just hang in there’.
I have not worked directly with Robin in years, but I still hold him in my mind. When I think of how much he knows, how generous he is with what he knows, how encouraging he is of younger researchers, how open he is to challenge and debate and the latest research findings, I still find myself thinking, ‘I want to be like that’.

Esa Österberg

HELSINKI, FINLAND

The Cost of Afternoon Excursions During Conferences

In Säästöpankkiopisto in Finland in 1974 at the Purple Book meeting, Pekka Sulkunen discreetly pointed to a young man entering the meeting venue and whispered to me: ‘He is the famous Robin Room’. Certainly Robin was not yet as famous as he would become and perhaps my memory is not totally accurate, but that was definitely the first time I saw Robin.

A year later, at the Purple Book meeting in Toronto, because of the shortage of visitor rooms in the research tower Robin and I stayed in the hospital section of the Addiction Research Foundation. Returning after a dinner in Chinatown to our hospital beds, we carried on our lively conversation about alcohol price elasticities. Some years later at the Kettil Bruun Society meeting in Dresden, we discussed more private things like marriage and living as human beings in this world.

These kinds of memories are important parts of one’s personal history, but in this context they easily become a testament to your own importance. Therefore, I will not describe our trips to Plitvice falls (then located in Yugoslavia) or Åland Islands in Finland. But it is relevant that I add one more car trip before moving on to Greece. It was a trip in Alberta, Canada, to visit the Jasper National Park in the Rocky Mountains. During that trip we had real problems keeping the car on the road, which was covered with wet and slippery clay. I was elected to steer, partly because I had experience driving on icy winter roads in Finland and partly, I guess, because of the reputation of the famous Finnish rally drivers. Robin, his son Joshua and my son Kari were pushing the car with all their might and ended up covered nearly head to toe in mud.

Perhaps because of these previous adventures, at the International Council on Alcohol and Addiction meeting in Athens in 1983, Robin, who seldom ducks out of conferences, got the idea of hiring a car to visit the Peloponnesos and especially the amphitheatre in Epidaurus. The weather was fine, everything went well and we
managed to locate the amphitheatre, which had amazing acoustics. Somewhere after the amphitheatre we began to calculate how much time we would need to get back to Athens, where Robin was to accept the Jellinek Prize, which had been awarded that time jointly to Robin and Klaus Mäkelä—perhaps jointly because they were both so young to be receiving such an honour. To keep the story short, I clutched the steering wheel desperately, trying not to take too many risks but breaking more traffic rules than I ever had before. After nearly two hours of driving we reached Robin’s hotel; he rushed in—and as I was later told—put his suit on, ran to the meeting venue and got his Jellinek Prize, all while I was returning the car to the rental agency.

Pekka Sulkunen

HELSEINKI, FINLAND

Robin in Paris

Robin was invited to give a talk in Paris on international drug policy by the Automobile Club de France, established in 1895 and one of the most exclusive and prestigious public associations of the haute bourgeoisie and aristocracy in that country. It was early spring 1982. I was doing my postdoc year in Paris, studying sociology, anthropology and semiotics. Robin and I were, although not quite knowing it, both getting intellectually equipped for what amounted to the ‘surf’ of cultural studies in sociology, having shared interests in representations of drinking and alcoholism in films and hoping to set up a study in France for comparisons between American and Finnish film materials. So we decided to meet.

It could have been the Café de la Paix at the Opera. We had aperos, then walked and talked. I gave him a flurry of ‘tout Paris’ talk about the undisclosed but conjectured epistemological presuppositions, interests of knowledge and intrigues among Parisian intellectuals, including sociologists like Touraine, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, Boudon, Crozier and others. This is what I had been listening to every week in the café at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. Sociologists at that time were public figures in France, on a par with philosophers and literary luminaries for media attention. They all had their flocks of disciples, and it was felt that the truths they professed had historical significance. This seemed as uninteresting to Room as it sounds juvenile and antiquated to me today. But it was then seriously important on the Boulevard Raspail where the Ecole was located.
Robin talked about the intricacies of drug policy, of which I then knew nothing. He was in the early phase of his future key role as an expert on international drug and alcohol policy, a new area for him too, coming from a survey background in the alcohol field. My background interest was alcohol consumption as part of the capitalist accumulation process. Three worlds: American sociological survey culture, Nordic/German critical or Marxist theory and gossipy Parisian intellectual culture. No connection. But Robin and I were moving in the same direction: to understand the meaningful moments in human behaviour, which was an orientation more or less missing in our own background milieus. In this, the French cultural anthropology and sociology did have serious things to offer, we felt. Robin read all the anthropological and historical books on drinking, alcoholism and alcohol control published at that time in France, in French of course!

Some of our first experiences of including France in our comparative efforts were quite stunning. We applied for funding for a study of drinking in France with French colleagues. Only the part on films was accepted, not the part on policy that we would have liked to know more about, and nothing related to public health. The film study, as our French colleagues understood, was not exactly what we had expected. The first paper given by our French colleagues on the subject was about an American film noir gangster movie. The presentation lasted not ten minutes, as at Kettil Bruun Society meetings, nor twenty as at normal conferences, but over an hour. By that time the speaker had advanced only as far as having analysed the pre-text part of the film: the title and credits—that is, before the story had actually begun. We had fallen into a disciplinary gorge: film semiotics is about films, not about societies or even cultures. How do you compare French governing images of drinking with Finnish or American images?

Then there was a fourth world. Robin was staying at one of the five-star hotels next to the Opera, booked for him by the Automobile Club. Robin told me that the gentlemen there were politely interested in what he had to say, but he had the impression they would have been more interested in the devouring monster in the drug alcohol, which seems to take captives even among their rank. The hotel was de luxe. Robin had been invited to have lunch in their restaurant, and bring a wife or a friend. I went with him. The meal was asparagus with lobster sauce, and the rest in that style. The bill was over five hundred francs, much more than my monthly allowance. The fourth world covered the charge.

Thank you once again, Robin!
KBS Kampala, Uganda, 2013. A lunchtime meeting of the ongoing International Group for Studies of Alcohol’s Harm to Others. Other-than-KBS groups often meet separately during the week-long meetings. If, like Robin, you are working on several projects, it becomes quite hectic.
Alcohol Policy Studies

Robin: ‘International Study of Alcohol Control Experiences (1976–81) was a follow-on project from the Purple Book. It was a collaborative project by the sociologists who had shown in the Purple Book what levers governments could press to affect alcohol consumption. We wanted to study the social history of each of our cultures to understand why none of our governments had been pressing them. We were able to do this study because our by now seven countries (Finland, Canada [data from Ontario], the Netherlands, the United States [data from California], Poland, Switzerland and Ireland) had all been strong temperance societies with a long history of collecting data on alcohol sales and consumption. One of the ISACE discoveries was that there were long waves (increases and decreases) of change in consumption that were much the same in all seven countries. This implied mutual influence and a dynamic beyond simple economics. It also lent credence to the idea, now at the heart of all my work, that what happened in one country or society could be informative and helpful to other people and governments with similar concerns.

‘We continued on after ISACE in a variety of directions for studying alcohol policy—how policies are formed and develop, popular opinions about alcohol problems, what the effects of alcohol policy changes are, and of course looking, as we had in ISACE, in other countries at how alcohol consumption and problems and policies had developed over time, as I did for Australia in my piece published in 1988.

‘In 1983 Klaus Mäkelä and I were jointly awarded the Jellinek Prize for Alcohol Studies, and we delivered together our response as a defence of ‘The Rights of the Drunkard’. It reasserted Klaus’ and my 1960s social concerns agenda, including defending the rights of the underdog.

‘In many ways Klaus and I always remained 1960s student movement radicals studying social change, especially why change is so difficult to achieve. When I realised that despite demonstrating our hearts out we were accomplishing very little, I decided to study sociology in order to figure out what needed to be done. Both Klaus and I became social scientists who had a clear idea about what it took to build a social movement but not knowing what it took to accomplish social change. So we built research teams as if we were building a social movement and we were determined to figure out social change, asking how governments can get their alcohol policy so wrong, and what needs to be done to get that to change’.
Dear Robin,

I have been terribly remiss on your behalf. I know there is a big celebration of your career happening September 13 and I dearly wish I could join you. Having the celebration halfway around the world makes it challenging! I have been asked to send some reminiscences, but in lieu of giving you my thoughts and appreciations through intermediaries, let me add to the celebration by communicating directly with you.

The alcohol and tourism research was but one example of how you mentored me and steered me to interesting, challenging and creative research and policy endeavours. When asked about how I got started in this alcohol policy and the law gig, I like to talk about how right out of law school I became an ‘instant expert’, the only alcohol policy legal researcher in the country. It was a time when the alcohol policy field was just emerging in the United States, largely under your intellectual guidance. The opportunity was irresistible. From those early papers we did together on alcohol policy, to my dramshop grant, the National Academy of Science Report and my paper on federal agencies, your support for the Prevention Research Centre—not to mention the incredible team of bright and irreverent scholars and ne’er-do-wells you, Don and Ron assembled at the Social Research Group/Alcohol Research Group—you helped me set a professional course that I am grateful for. It’s been a challenging, intellectually stimulating, exciting and fun run. It’s only somewhat frustrating to be constantly battered by a giant multinational industry that treats its critics like irritating gnats.

I’m glad we were able to have the ARG 40th reunion a few years back so that we could reassemble the team and celebrate those early days in the field. I have some great memories of our time working together—at the NAS meeting how you were pushing ‘making the world safe for drunks’ and watching Mark Moore and Dean Gerstein cringe. I don’t know how you convinced Dean to let me write that federal agencies piece. Persistence combined with a sharp and creative mind that Dean just couldn’t handle, I guess. In retrospect, I am amazed that you let me go off on the alcohol tax deduction research or let Larry and me drift into alcohol advertising law and then on to PRC. You set a high mark for serving as a mentor, looking out for the mentee’s interests and development as the primary criteria, which I have tried to emulate throughout my career as I work with younger researchers today.

So I celebrate you in absentia, and assume that your party does not mean you are planning to go out to pasture but will continue to challenge the rest of us to rethink our paradigms and assumptions, push the envelope, advocate for social
change and improved public health, and do so with good humour, though hopefully at a more leisurely pace.

Take care, and know that many of us who can’t make the celebration are thinking of you and appreciating both your enormous contributions to the field of alcohol studies and your guidance and friendship as a mentor over the years.

Jim

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Lenore Ralston

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

Robin,

How absolutely wonderful to hear from you, and then from Jim [Mosher]!! I’ve read Jim’s tribute to you, and it is a hard act to follow. I have always admired Jim’s writing, especially his ability to cut right to the core, which he has done well with regard to you and your impact on so many of us.

I would like to add to what Jim has to say about the place you had in my life. You seemed to ‘see’ me, and your encouragement meant so much to me. I loved the time I spent at the Alcohol Research Group, but I particularly enjoyed you and Jim. I have to say the endless meetings about survey questions often left me ready to bang my head against the wall!! But I loved seeing you in your office with the heaps of papers, me laughing inside because I knew you knew where everything was. This still brings a big smile to my face. Or times when Kaye Fillmore would be so mad she would be stamping her feet. Or the wall-to-wall and three-foot-high undealt-with paperwork I walked into as your new research administrator when an overwhelmed Tracy tried to leave ARG by simply closing the door. That was quite a lengthy excavation project! And I bet I never told you about the evening Walt suddenly appeared at my office door gun in hand while we were both working late? He’d heard noise I was making when he was sure everyone had gone home—scared the daylights out of both of us! So many stories … such a quirky, marvellous bunch of colleagues. Such an incredible community builder you were, Robin, and are. I chuckle as I think of what a collection of brilliant misfits you gathered around you.

Robin, I suspect your celebration of fifty years will be full of all the misfits you have collected and nurtured over the years, people you spotted and encouraged. And I am, again, grateful that you spotted me.

Lenore
Dear Robin,

Congratulations on your very impressive and substantial contributions to the fields of alcohol and other drug research, including, but not limited to, creating and sustaining networks of scholars, extensive published work on a vast array of critical topics and stimulating policy deliberations. I expect that there is much more to follow.

I recall that when we first met at the International Council on Alcohol Addictions conference in Amsterdam in August 1972 we discussed the single distribution model of alcohol consumption, which has its challenges but nevertheless contributed to a long overdue reframing of how to document and reduce alcohol-related harm at the population level.

At last count we have collaborated on about ten international projects, and a few focusing on Canada. We have collaborated on numerous papers, several books and book chapters. However, the quantity of your contributions is a very inadequate short-hand for your far-reaching contributions beyond the text and table.

You bring to each project a combination of insightful thoughts, extensive knowledge and apparently diversionary but highly relevant anecdotes, combined with a clear focus on goals and how to move forward to efficiently achieve them. I wish to briefly mention two projects.

I recall a meeting in a hotel lobby in Stockholm in October 1988, where in a window seat overlooking the pedestrian street in the old city, we sketched the plan for the first international symposium on community-based projects on the prevention of alcohol and other drugs. (I still have the original pages of your handwritten notes of this meeting.) It became the first in a series of six symposia.

In 1996, you encouraged me to apply to the National Health Research and Development Program to study changes in alcohol policy in Canada at both the federal and provincial levels. You provided sage advice on all dimensions of this work and were a lead or major contributor to several chapters in the book based on this project.

We also share a love of train travel and I recall our trip together from Milan to Bern in October 2002, where we caught up on research-related activities and alcohol policy topics while admiring glorious river valleys, mountains and waterfalls.

I hope there will more opportunities to travel together whether via research, policy deliberations or train.

With sincere thanks and warmest wishes,

Norman
I will not attempt to examine Robin’s written legacy in detail. His body of work is just so large and so important, and others know it better than I. Suffice it to say that Robin has always been enormously productive, not only as an author but also as an organiser. There would be no Kettil Bruun Society today, and there are many other productive international collaborative efforts that would never have occurred, without him.

Robin was also ever helpful and accommodating on national collaborative efforts when he was here in Canada, such as with the national economic cost estimation studies and the collaborative national statistical yearbooks.

Robin simply likes to help colleagues. It is well known and appreciated that Robin has an incredible memory and an encyclopedic mind. Robin and I were often in close proximity to one another, meaning I could save a lot of time and effort when researching a topic by simply asking Robin for the best references to check. He would often even get the volume numbers of journal articles correct. Robin has always been most generous in that regard.

But I think his greatest contribution to the field has been his ability to inspire interest and even enthusiasm from graduate students and young researchers, drawing much needed talent into the difficult and contentious field of addictions epidemiology and policy. Overall, I think it would be hard to overestimate Robin’s impact on the history of the field over his lifetime.

I hope he continues to enjoy his work and life back in his native Australia.
We couldn’t really dream of getting such an international star as Robin Room to come to our little cold and dark country in northern Europe. But when a position as professor in social science alcohol research was announced in 1997 in Stockholm, many of us nagged Robin to apply, and in competition with other leading international scholars Robin was awarded the position. The professorship was a central part of establishing a new research institute: the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs at Stockholm University. Robin’s task was to build up and direct a new institute from scratch: recruit staff, raise funding from research councils and, not least, hold the institute together and cultivate the enthusiasm that is so essential in what is often arduous research work.

Robin’s work at SoRAD, which spanned the period 1999 to 2006, was indeed a success story in all these respects. He recruited talented researchers, was successful in getting funding and enjoyed the popular support that is so hard to get as a director of an institute, as we know all too well from our own experiences. This can be explained by the combination of Robin’s generosity as a person and his broad and genuine interests that include not only areas widely apart but also different research approaches, from anthropology to epidemiology. Another of Robin’s unique contributions was his ability to draw researchers from around the world to visit SoRAD, and in many cases also spend some time there. This added an important dimension to his leadership and served as a great inspiration to the staff, who were able to listen and make contacts with many ‘international stars’ in alcohol and drug research.

Being a very humble person, Robin did not want any specific privileges as director of SoRAD. Despite his heavy workload and frequent travelling, he insisted that he have responsibility for the SoRAD kitchen and the preparation of fika (Swedish coffee break) one week every semester just like the rest of the staff. He also rejected having the largest room in the corridor, suitable for a director, selecting instead a medium-size office like everyone else’s. That choice perhaps became a challenge, as piles of documents grew tall and then taller over the years in Robin’s office, creating a unique atmosphere that amused any visitor who happened to look into his office. The appearance of chaos was however an illusion—no other office was actually so well organised as Robin’s. He could immediately pick up any article someone asked for or find one he’d just suggested someone read.

In spite of all our appreciation we are disappointed on one point: that Robin left us in 2006. On the other hand, this has given many of us the opportunity to visit
another part of the world and to create contacts with Robin’s new research group. We have also learned that despite a long geographical distance, Robin is sometimes as reachable as he was when sitting in the room next door—few colleagues are so quick in responding to emails as Robin, and no one is able to fill them with so much useful information. Given this, and that Robin is still visiting Sweden on a regular basis, we are happy to conclude that he did not end up being so far away as we feared when he left Sweden for Australia eight years ago.

Gabriel Romanus

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Robin and I first met in Tangiers, Morocco, in 1982 at the congress of the International Council of Alcohol and Addictions. Robin was already a leading person in ICAA, a member of the board and head of the ICAA’s epidemiology section. We became colleagues, in the sense that I was asked to chair a new section on alcohol policy, and was later elected to the board.

After a few years, Robin and others got tired of the erratic leadership of the ICAA and started the Kettil Bruun Society as an alternative to the ICAA’s epidemiology section. At a board meeting at the beginning of the 1990s, we also tried to terminate, or at least limit, the term of the ICAA Executive Director. We achieved a tied vote (really a majority, since one of the board members later confessed that he agreed with us but voted against us, in order not to embarrass the president).

As a reward for this effort, Robin and I, together with two other ‘troublemakers’, were both kicked off the board at the congress in San Diego in 1995. The Executive Director certainly proved to be efficient in getting rid of people she didn’t like. She achieved this by making use of the ICAA statutes, which gave a great number of votes to individual persons from Saudi Arabia—equal to that of member organisations. (This was effectively a case of the Kingdom buying votes.)

Behind this purge was not only mutual personal dislike but also different views within the organisation about the role of alcohol industries. I once, somewhat desperately, asked a knowledgeable fellow board member why the Saudis took the Executive Director’s side. ‘Considering the Saudi view on alcohol’, I said, ‘they should side with us, rather than with her’. ‘But these are wet Saudis’, he answered. Maybe that was the case.

Anyway, several years later, after the alcohol industry’s influence on the board
had been removed and with a shift in leadership, Robin and I have been re-installed—as honorary vice presidents—and we have also received ‘lifetime achievement awards’. It even looked for a while like Robin might be elected as president of the organisation, if ICAA survives to the next congress.

The ICAA experience tells several things about Robin. He is not the type of researcher who sits above the rest of us in his ivory tower, and tells the scientific world how things are in a language ordinary people find impossible to understand. He wants to influence real life and is prepared to pay the price of interacting with everyone involved. He also is prepared to speak his mind, even when it seems inconvenient. And, as one of my friends commented after an ICAA conference where Robin had taken part in workshops on alcohol policy: ‘He is like any other participant; he makes relevant and constructive comments also on papers presented by NGO activists and by their opponents’. In other words, despite being one of the leading researchers in the world in his field, Robin is remarkably democratic and humble.

When we first met, Robin was leading the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley, California. Then he became the scientific leader of the Addiction Research Foundation in Ontario, Canada. Under his leadership, ARF issued policy advice on alcohol taxation, retail monopoly and other controversial issues. As a former parliamentarian myself, I always suspected he became too inconvenient to some conservatives in the provincial government, so through some ‘organisational changes’ his position was eliminated.

However unfortunate this was for Ontario, it was good luck for Sweden, since at this time we were advertising the position for head of a new centre for alcohol and drug research at the University of Stockholm. So Robin became the first director of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs. After the first six-year period, the centre was subject to evaluation by an international panel, and came out with excellent reviews. When he reached normal retirement age in Sweden, Robin moved on to Australia for another eight years in Melbourne.

Robin and Gretchen became Swedish citizens while they were here, so when (if ever) Robin retires from his present position in Melbourne, we hope to see them come back to Sweden as senior citizens. In the field of alcohol policy, there is always a need for activists.
Patricia Morgan
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

I am very grateful for the opportunity to honour the person who was responsible for so much of my early academic life. When I was a graduate student, almost forty years ago, Robin Room and the Alcohol Research Group gave me the physical space and intellectual support to write a dissertation. As a postdoctoral fellow and novice research scientist, Robin guided my entry into the world of cross-national alcohol research.

Robin was an extraordinary mentor. I was amazed at his unfailing encyclopedic knowledge of the literature, and constantly cheerful persona. Most important for me as a young scholar, Robin had the unique and wonderful ability to inspire and challenge you simultaneously. He never ever once gave you an empty compliment. And he never ever gave you a harsh critique.

Of course much of this awareness comes in hindsight, which makes me grateful to be asked to reflect on the career of this exceptional person. So, all I can say is thank you, Robin, for being my mentor and my friend.

Grazyna Zajdow
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

In an area where there had previously been too little sociological interest, Robin Room almost singlehandedly produced a whole genre. Perhaps others might have stepped into the breach, but thankfully he did. Speaking as a sociologist, my work, meagre as it is, would have been much more difficult to produce without his contribution to the sociology of alcohol and drug use, which has been immense and so important.

As a colleague, Robin is generous to a fault, and I am pleased to have been able to contribute to this collection and show him (and the rest of the academic world) how highly I hold him in my estimation.
I’ve worked with Robin in many different contexts for almost a decade and a half, but it is my doctoral years that I remember the most, and they also made the biggest impact. It was Robin who applied and was granted funding for the project that became the basis of my dissertation on our national alcohol politics since Sweden became a member of the European Union. Rumours were circulating in the Center for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs corridors that political scientists were being interviewed for a new project and I asked Robin why no one had asked me. He immediately arranged for an interview, where I was asked to talk about my undergraduate thesis. As this thesis had nothing to do with either Swedish alcohol politics or the EU but was rather about the situation in Chiapas, Mexico, the conversation was over pretty quickly, and Robin said: ‘So, based on Marxist theory then?’ I had at that point no idea what he was talking about, but I remember agreeing happily all the same.

Robin is best described, as all his PhD students concluded in our PowerPoint presentation at his farewell party at SoRAD, as an SOS: a Supportive Optimistic Supervisor. This meant huge piles of books and articles landing on my desk so I could ‘get an overview of the field’, long meetings where we talked about all the interesting aspects of alcohol policy, but also apprehension when I sent him a paper for comments after months of work—which would be returned the very next morning filled with comments and tips for more references, linguistic corrections and general suggestions for improvement. When Robin left SoRAD for Australia the handwritten comments became equally fast replies in track changes mode. I was always a little nervous before sending drafts to Robin but also always grateful and extremely impressed when I got them back.

As doctoral students we found that there was a pattern in Robin’s comments. The typical stages were: 1. ‘It’s a good start’, 2. ‘It’s getting there’, 3. ‘It’s almost there’ and finally 4. ‘Well done!’ You’d often get ‘it’s getting there’ or ‘it’s almost there’ several times before the ‘well done!’ He also conveyed a sense of optimism and support in happy acclamations, such as ‘courage!’, when one needed them most.

Robin is a walking library. This has made working with him all the more exciting. Not only does he have an enormous amount of knowledge about alcohol research but during his time at SoRAD he could also pick up with enviable precision any topical article on a given question from one of the tall piles of printouts on his desk. You could also rest assured that if Robin told you nothing had been published within a particular field, this was the case. If you had missed reading the newspaper in the
morning, you could be sure to find any pieces relevant to SoRAD’s work pinned to the noticeboard, in your inbox or taped to the kitchen cupboards.

I have a theory that Robin has been blessed with more hours in a day than the rest of us. How, otherwise, could it be possible to read, learn and write so much? I remember complaining about the limited hours in a day and that I had to put my interest in Latin America temporarily on the shelf to focus on the EU and alcohol, and Robin just looked at me smiling and asked why. I also remember a lovely SoRAD summer lunch followed by a field trip to the Vaxholm Fortress when Robin showed that not only were his days longer but also his knowledge of Swedish history far exceeded mine!

So, Robin, I have said it before, and I’ll say it again: your infinite knowledge both within and outside the alcohol field, your advice and editing, but also your ideas for fascinating new projects have all made me a better researcher. Thank you so much for your guidance, support and encouragement in the past, in the present and, I am sure, in the future.

Christoffer Tigerstedt

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Dear Robin,

After the memorial service for Juha Partanen in December 2013, you and I sat in his kitchen reminiscing about Juha. In passing I mentioned a talk about the origins of the Finnish Drinking Habits Survey that I had presented a few days before.

With a blink your eyes refocused, became empty and concentrated at the same time. They clearly moved forty-five years back. You were no longer looking at me but rather on things happening in late-1960s Helsinki among your colleagues-to-be.

I have seen that gaze before in you, but never so visibly. Something very Robin-like, something to remember.

Toffy

P.S. I have translated that talk, ‘A Short History of a Longlasting Drinking Habits Survey’, and Gretchen promises to give it to you on The Day. I hope it will amuse you.
Ireland Owes Robin a Debt of Gratitude

My first sighting of Robin was at the 1995 World Health Organization ministerial conference in Paris, but I dared not approach the great man himself. I was there in my role as policy adviser to the Irish Department of Health, just a few ‘wet’ months into the job. A few years later, while at a European Citizen Action Service meeting in Sweden, I first heard about the Kettil Bruun Society (thank you, Ingeborg, I’m forever grateful) and discovered a whole new world of high-quality alcohol science, lively debate and friendly souls—a new ‘family’. Since my first KBS meeting in Montreal in 1999 Robin has been a mentor to me as I attempted to raise the thorny issue of the ‘demon drink’ in Ireland, which, of course, ran counter to the tide of the growing Celtic Tiger. Robin was encouraging, supportive, gracious and always interested. No request for help was too small and his several visits to Dublin to argue the science of effective policy were instrumental in the ground-breaking Strategic Task Force on Alcohol Reports (2002, 2004). These laid the foundations for the current development of the first-ever Public Health Bill on Alcohol in Ireland, unthinkable a decade ago. This year, Robin responded again to a call to action in Ireland on alcohol’s harm to others. His fan base in the Irish public health community has grown, with much talk and texting this spring about ‘how wonderful it was to meet the great Robin Room at last’.

As we say in Ireland of true greats, ‘His like will not be seen again’—*Ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann.*
At the beginning of December 1983 I started work at the then Department of Social Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, hired to run a new multidisciplinary, one-year diploma in addiction studies. Financial support for this new program had been provided by the Department of Health, which was the central government department with policy and funding responsibility for treatment and rehabilitation of problem drinkers and drug users in the Republic of Ireland. While the immediate justification for the establishment of the program was Dublin’s new problem of injecting heroin use, I was encouraged to develop a broad curriculum. In particular, I was encouraged to promote critical sociological thinking on the question of alcohol-related problems, despite the fact that official policy in Ireland at that time was still firmly rooted in the disease concept of alcoholism.

The preparation time was short—students had already been selected and teaching was due to start in the first week of January 1984—so I had less than a month to design the curriculum and see what library materials were available to me and my new students. I quickly compiled a list of books, in this pre-electronic library era, which I thought would be useful, and went off to meet with the subject librarian to see what she was prepared to order. She was, as I recall, particularly sceptical when I asked if it would be possible to get a hard copy of the PhD dissertation ‘Governing Images of Alcohol and Drug Problems’, written in 1978 by a sociologist at Berkeley, Robin Room. American PhD dissertations, she told me, were rarely worth reading; and even if I struggled through this particular tome, she was sure that none of my students ever would and that it would otherwise remain unread, simply taking up valuable shelf space. I persisted, she relented, and the stamp date indicates that ‘Governing Images’ made its appearance in the Trinity College library on 29 January 1984.

Immediately prior to writing this piece, thirty years later, I went down to the library to confirm the wisdom of my persistence. Robin’s PhD dissertation is now a venerable, dog-eared document which bears all the marks of having been much read and pondered over: the glued-on title is peeling and the document itself has—contrary to all rules and regulations—been subjected to decades of underlining, highlighting and annotation. With or without encouragement from me, generations of Trinity students have read, discussed and benefited from this dissertation; some of them read it first and then went on to read more of Robin’s writings, while others came across references to the dissertation in his later writings and were drawn that way to read it. And the great thing was that there was much more to read from
Robin who, either writing as sole author or in collaboration with researchers from all kinds of disciplines and from all parts of the world, consistently produced high-quality addiction research that had universal relevance.

Over the intervening decades and as we extended our addictions teaching to Masters level, publications by Robin have featured constantly on our reading lists; and for more than ten years now members of alcohol and drug policy networks in Ireland have also had a chance to see the maestro perform live when he has visited this country, either to speak at conferences or to contribute to the policy process. It is generally agreed that Robin wears his learning lightly and that, for instance, while critical of the machinations of the drinks industry, he never comes across as an extremist or zealot.

Let me conclude by recalling what one student (an addiction counsellor from the midlands of Ireland) said, having just read the entire PhD dissertation: ‘That Robin Room is some boy!’ To those who understand this, no explanation is necessary. To those who don’t, no explanation is likely to suffice. But take it from me, compliments come no higher.

Franca Beccaria and Allaman Allamani

TORINO (CUNEO) and FLORENCE, ITALY

Among Hills, Gardens and Waters, a Discourse that Has Never Ceased

Franca and Allaman met several years ago and developed a professional collaboration and friendship over time, even though Franca lives in the countryside of Cuneo, south of Turin in north-east Italy, and Allaman in Florence in central Italy. One of the main points of contact between them has been the Kettil Bruun Society symposia, which Allaman has attended almost since their inception in 1986, and Franca has attended lately (but not too late: since 1996!). At KBS symposia the Italian flag was often carried only by us. But there was always one person at KBS functions who was the connective tissue for all of us—Robin, the founder, the soul and instigator, as well as, now, honorary president of KBS.

We have relished the opportunity to meet, talk and share convivial moments with Robin in the past, as well as in the very recent past, during the last symposium in Turin, held on the university campus beside the rushing waters of the Dora Riparia river. Now, during a rarefied summer time, after the rush and concerns of the organisation of the symposium have passed, we think it is a good time to launch a
Allaman asks Franca: ‘When did you first meet Robin?’

I ‘met’ Robin through a paper he presented in Italy, in the hilly area of Santo Stefano Belbo, in 1989, just two years before I was introduced by Amedeo Cottino to alcohol studies. The paper was about ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ drinking cultures, a concept that we have used so much in Italy that it is known today even among some journalists. Last year I participated in a television program in Milan. The journalist introduced the topic mentioning wet and dry cultures. In that moment I immediately thought of Robin, and what he would have thought about the question.

The first time I met Robin in person was in Edinburgh at my first KBS symposium. I was a PhD student, young and shy, so I was not able to say a word. But since then, for me he has been ‘the world’s boss of alcohol’!!

Franca asks Allaman: ‘And you, Allaman, how many years before me did you meet Robin?’

The first time I met Robin was in Berkeley, California, in 1984, shortly before the meeting at Santo Stefano Belbo, Piedmont. In Florence I had just started an organisation that was later to become the Alcohol Centre for Treatment, Prevention and Research within the hospital’s gastroenterology unit, and I was also working on research into the family and systemic approaches to people with alcohol-dependence problems. I had gone to San Francisco to visit Deborah, who six years later would be the mother of our son. Knowing that I was dealing with problematic drinking in Florence, Deborah encouraged me make an appointment with Robin. She had met Robin through her friend Genevieve Ames, who was an anthropologist like her, and a colleague of Robin’s.

I remember the wooden Alcohol Research Group building at the foot of the Berkeley hills, the welcome emanating from that environment, and the great attention paid to me, an unknown Florentine doctor, by my interviewer. I was taken by the atmosphere there of a scientific approach and respect that I had never experienced before. I could not decide whether it was due to Robin’s personality and his sociological group, or to the larger Californian culture in which the group was ensconced. No doubt it was both. Ever since the symposium held beside the azure sea in Dubrovnik in 1986, I have experienced that atmosphere again and again in the many KBS meetings, where I have always felt like a lucky trainee.

Allaman to Franca: ‘What is your most vivid memory of Robin?’

The most vivid image I have is of Robin as the first person to stand up and sing at KBS dinners, with the joy of a child on his face! For this reason I have to be forgiven by Robin: this year at the KBS meeting in Torino, in two situations—the conference
dinner and again at my house—Robin was almost prevented from singing because of a lack of time. Both locations—the medieval castle alongside the Po river with its romantic atmosphere, and my home in the countryside—were perfect for singing all night long, but Robin was interrupted for want of time. Of course, culpability has to be attributed to the organisers!

**Franca to Allaman:** ‘**Allaman, I’m sure that you have got some more personal memories. I am going to become envious of you!’**

Perhaps my numerous personal memories are the result of the many more years I’ve had, compared to yours, Franca. I have at least four vivid personal memories that I am reminded of. The first was during the 1998 KBS symposium in Florence a year after Deborah and I separated. Robin, carrying a bouquet of flowers, made a visit with Gretchen to the house on the hill above the main hospital, where Deborah and Emmanuel were living. I was so grateful. The second remembrance is the dinner I had with a few other colleagues, in the Rooms’ beautiful home, with all those stairs and many flowers, in Melbourne, at the end of the KBS symposium in Australia; I felt so honoured. Then, the lunch we had in September 2011 in my recently re-arranged garden in Florence (you, Franca were there too), after the meeting organised by Monash University in Prato. And finally, there is the conversation of an epistemological flavour held in the pool of the Speke Resort in Kampala, Uganda. Again, Franca, you were there. You joined us as Robin, Pia Mäkelä and I were in conversation, puzzling together about how to ascertain the scientific quality of an ‘alcohol’ paper.

**Allaman to Franca:** ‘**Franca, what is the most important lesson you have received from Robin?**’

Robin pays the same attention listening to a PhD student as to a world famous scientist. And with the same desire to share knowledge and curiosity, he raises his hand to ask a question or make a comment. From him I’ve learnt the importance of that sort of respect; that it has to be given and deserved, in personal life as well as in professional life. Do you remember when Robin encouraged us and supported us to publish our studies on drinking changes in Italy in *Contemporary Drug Problems*? It was a great opportunity, because it meant that the ‘Italian mystery’ began at last to be debated outside Italy.

**Franca to Allaman:** ‘**What do you think you “gave” to Robin during all the past years?’**

Perhaps I reassured him that Anglo-American sociological knowledge can, at least partially, be understood by a medical doctor in southern Europe.
Allaman to Franca: ‘What is the major perplexity that Robin causes you?’

To paraphrase the Commandment, ‘Thou shalt have no other god but me’: sometimes I’ve thought that Robin has no other god but alcohol studies! But during that sweet and relaxed dinner in your garden in Florence you just mentioned, I discovered that Robin, supported by Gretchen, has a deep spirituality too and many other interests.

Franca to Allaman: ‘And if you were to make a small critical remark about him?’

One, so to speak, criticism I have of Robin, is that he had little confidence in our finding funding for our project ‘Alcohol Policy and Contextual Factors in Europe’, which we presented to various influential people in the alcohol field in the mid-2000s. Actually, I think Robin, as well as other experts, were right in their pessimistic assessment. But the unexpected occurred. The project was supported first by Eva Buiatti, of the Tuscany Health Regional Agency, then by Peter Anderson and the large AMPHORA project, and funded by the European Commission. We were able to collect data from many countries, to perform analyses and provide interesting results. I’m glad I was successful in my ‘trial’ with Robin, and I am sure he too is quite happy about that.

Franca and Allaman, final choir for two voices:

Thank you Robin
We did fly
In the blue
Of the sky
(of science and practice and education)

Volare, oh oh ...
I first became aware of Robin’s interest in social justice and equality when he turned up at the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, where I was a volunteer, in 2007. With Gretchen, Robin watched two documentaries back to back: *Orange Revolution*, chronicling the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, followed by *The World According to Sesame Street*, looking at the cultural impact of the children’s television series and the complexities of creating international adaptations.

In February 2011, while demonstrators gathered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, Robin was interviewed for the journal *Addiction*. He said:

I’ve been reading the news from Egypt, and it reminds me of Berkeley which had a real revolution in 1964 with the free speech movement. It was a small-scale revolution, no-one died for the cause, but it had all of those aspects of this sudden feeling of liberation and enormous euphoria, until the world turns real again.

I remember in the early month or two after the movement you’d go up on campus and on every little sapling there’d be a leaflet—you know, “Grad Student Union Anthropology Meeting this Afternoon”, et cetera, et cetera. Everyone was sort of mobilised and energised by it, and all that energy went off in all kinds of unpredictable directions.

Soon after, Robin became interested in another revolution:

The one job I ever had as a pure grad student in sociology was for William Kornhauser, whose course I had taken. Kornhauser was writing a book on left-wing revolutions and wanted each student to write a case study, which would become a chapter. What he had in mind were the left-wing military coups and revolutions occurring in South America in the late ’60s and ’70s. I said to him ‘What about the English Civil War? You know, Cromwell’s New Model Army of 1640’. Kornhauser sort of gulped and said hesitantly ‘Yeah ... OK ...’. So I went and read everything I could and, in doing so, decided that where I really belonged, politically, was as a member of the Levellers, a group of radical dissenters in the English Civil War (1642–9) who called for the abolition of the monarchy, social and agrarian reforms, and religious freedom in the Army debates in Putney in 1647: ‘—Truest be that the poorest as well as the richest he has a stake in the affairs of the commonwealth’. In that moment the Levellers laid out the next 300 years of British history. The Army had won the War, they were within sight of London, and they had to figure out what to do next. There wasn’t any Karl Marx, no model existed. So they sat down and elected two ‘Agitators’ from each regiment and for a week, in a Putney church,
debated what to do next. William Clarke, a secretary to the Army, used shorthand to keep a remarkably full record, which survived. It was later decoded in 1890. It was the second ideological army in European history, as opposed to being a feudal army where people are there because their lord is there and they owe fealty to their lord, or a mercenary Army, where they’re just hired. And it reflects the Protestant reformation, even though this Civil War wasn’t specifically about the reformation, but these ‘London apprentices’, young tradespeople from London essentially, marched into battle singing hymns, and they were doing it because they believed in it.

And I would draw a line between this and the 1960s and that piece of work we did in Berkeley, which was around how ideas change in a culture. We happened to be doing it around alcohol, and to some extent drugs, but that was the link.

There is a nice link here between Robin living through a cultural revolution at Berkeley, a time of revolution in Egypt, and his interest in an early revolution.

Maggie Brady

One of the many things I admire in Robin is his ability to fire up intellectually in response to whatever obscure aspect of the world of alcohol one might be pondering at the time. These responses are usually accompanied by him gently suggesting an extraordinarily useful range of references from the literature. He does this in part (because most of it appears to be filed in his head) with the aid of towering piles of papers and articles that are to be found arrayed on the desks and tables, and sometimes the floor, of his office.

I first saw these piles in his room at the Alcohol Research Foundation in Toronto in the early 1990s. Robin is not a tall man, and occasionally, while hunting for a particular piece of paper, he disappeared behind them. The paper towers must have to be recreated every time Robin moves appointments and cities, and I was impressed to see them, years later, resurrected in his home study in Melbourne. How, one wonders, does he manage to move them in the right order? And keep them up to date? Because, of course, he knows exactly what is in each pile and where to look for just the right reference.

Who else but Robin would be able to refer me to Alma Whittaker’s *Bacchus Behave! The Lost Art of Polite Drinking* (1933)? A book so obscure and rare that there is only one library copy available in Australia! In anticipation of the need to
reframe drinking in a post-Prohibition era, Ms Whittaker wrote encouragingly that it was vitally important, ‘that we should learn to become fastidious in the matter of liquor. The hostesses of the United States must see to it that vulgar excess becomes taboo’.

Thank you, Robin, for your quirky and expansive mind, and for your years of interest, encouragement and inspiration.

Fried Wittman

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

Dear Robin,

I was one of the legion of young professionals and graduate students that you enticed into the alcohol and other drugs field. In 1978 you drew me into the vortex of inquiry and action that has done so much to shape the world’s thinking about alcohol. The disciplines you assembled at the Social Research Group (eventually the Alcohol Research Group) covered research, teaching, program planning, service delivery and policy-making. All were generally concerned about health, safety and social problems attributable to alcohol. Your work to stimulate so many people to undertake alcohol studies is surely as important as the specific research you have undertaken and the papers you have written.

My experience with SRG-ARG occurred during a magic time from the mid-1970s to 1983 when you gathered a cross-disciplinary cadre of young investigators to explore the findings and preventive implications of SRG’s just-completed first national household survey on alcohol experiences. The survey had raised new and puzzling questions about the nature of social alcohol problems hitherto studied only in clinical contexts as diseases and personal maladies. You challenged the utility, validity and applicability of the disease concept approach to individual alcoholism, looking instead at alcohol problems in social aggregates as socio-economic phenomena with problematic fallouts (‘sequelae’, you called them). You took on the study of political and cultural domains at local community, regional and state levels. In 1983 this seed pod burst into the creation of the Prevention Research Center across town from SRG-ARG.

As a budding architect and community planner, I was intrigued about how alcohol problems manifest through interactions between drinkers and the design of settings and circumstances where alcohol is available (purchased and consumed). You encouraged me to study the community situations and circumstances of alcohol
use and abuse, and to explore what could be done about them at municipal and state levels. Since alcohol-related problems are consumption-related disorders, certainly the settings and circumstances of consumption, particularly at local community levels of shared experiences (neighbourhoods, cities), must be important factors in people’s alcohol experiences. My interests included specific locations (places), types of settings and ecological impacts on entire community systems—land-use patterns, public administration, the interplay between norms and settings.

In 1976 you invited me to write a paper for SRG on the topic: What Would a City Planner Do to Prevent Alcohol Problems in Californian Communities? I have always had a sense of never having quite finished that paper—in a way my career has been driven by wanting to complete that piece of work. It has led me to working on the community settings and circumstances of alcohol problems and looking for and exploring interdisciplinary opportunities for prevention planning and research. Over the years the work expanded into four large areas: building a critical mass for social research into aggregate alcohol experiences, the One-Mile Limit study, rediscovery of ‘local control’ and community-environment planning for prevention of alcohol and other drug problems.

Four enduring accomplishments for the advancement of alcohol and drug prevention have emerged from those magic days at 1816 Scenic Avenue. They are advances that have originated in large part due to your efforts at ARG, and you have continued to reinforce them in Canada, Sweden and now Australia. First came the groundwork for the prodigious output of the Prevention Research Center; then expansion of our work about ‘local control’ of retail alcohol outlets in California, which brought about national and international visibility for community environment and policy approaches to prevention. That new visibility led in turn to many-layered work in community environment prevention planning.

A parallel effort was a complex report for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism on facilities planning and designing prevention guidelines for treatment facilities and halfway housing. I began this work as a positivist architect, believing the local alcohol treatment service programs would serve as the starting point for design guidelines similar to what we had already been working on for the National Institute of Mental Health and Community Mental Health Centers. Rather than being a driving force for change, the report was, disappointingly, accepted as ‘useful for understanding how community-wide treatment service facilities were organized and how they functioned as settings to serve alcoholics and drug addicts’. Our investigations and reports did lead to my being invited to join the Initial Review Group for grants for the just-formed Prevention Division, where you and I met up again. Later I was called on as an architectural consultant and housing expert to administer the McKinney Act demonstration project to provide services to homeless alcoholics (1989–96). This led to some papers describing the design and function of architecture for sober housing (a concept I have collaborated on with Ron...
Roizen), which have led recently to further research work with ARG on sober housing resident characteristics, resident outcomes and community relations.

So now that I’ve retired from the University of California, Berkeley, I’ve come full circle back to ARG as an affiliate scientist. I feel that ARG is continuing the themes and styles you laid down back in the 1960s, and I feel very much at home there. I realise there have been many changes as well, some of them painful, but something of the fundamental spirit remains, especially the close connections between the study of alcohol social experiences, alcohol policy and the treatment and recovery aspects of alcoholism and alcohol problems.

In addition to creating the pot and providing many of the ingredients at 1816 Scenic, your take on two enduring concepts continues to influence me greatly.

*Research as the Handmaiden of Policy:* Kaye Fillmore’s classic paper on this perspective characterises the struggle between science and policy-making to create knowledge for multiple, conflicting purposes. You have always been an important voice helping to sort out multiple purposes and appreciating differences between science (knowledge, understanding) and utility (agency) for political, economic and social purposes. You have also been clear where one should stand as a scientist regarding the uses of knowledge for alcohol policy. Prevention research in social contexts is not bench-science in which key variables can be closely controlled, nor is it ever free of political and economic pressures. Being aware of these pressures and being cautious about who is paying for the research are first steps towards dealing with them. Speaking truth to power is also important; the minute it isn’t possible to do that, something has gone wrong and something has to be done to correct it, even when that means changing one’s name from SRG to ARG. Your persistence in critiquing the medical model and continued exploration of alcohol’s social phenomena stand out for me. I’ve also gravitated towards three corollaries:

(1) Remain independent and critical of the alcohol industry. This is the easy corollary. ARG’s decision not to accept industry money for its library at 1816 Scenic was an eye-opener. The beverage industry can never be a friend; it has different values and different interests. That doesn’t mean that we can’t find ways to talk despite our differences.

(2) Remain independent and critical of advocates for prevention policies. Providing information for use by prevention advocates and commenting on possible planning methods is not the same as advocating policies and specific courses of action. Researchers do the former; the advocacy community does the latter. The line between them gets blurry in the case of interactive participatory planning, but the distinction can be maintained. Ultimately the local community (not the researcher) decides what to do with the information and the findings.

(3) Remain independent and critical of public officials responsible for alcoholic beverages. Initially I was enthusiastic that local officials would rise to the occasion
once they understood the significance of local control to prevent harm and maintain high quality of life. We had outstanding successes in early community prevention planning demonstration projects. You were rightly sceptical. The successes were based on cherry-picking demo cities that knew they had problems and welcomed our help. In fact, local officials in California typically balance competing interests between proponents of commercial activity and advocates for health, safety and community welfare issues.

Persist in the pursuit of intractable problems: These are the most interesting ones. Horst Rittel and other planners also call them ‘wicked’ problems—moving targets that may change shape over time and upon further investigation and attempts at solutions. Persistence, doggedness and fidelity to clear thinking are the chief virtues here. One must build alliances of useful colleagues to study these problems. The international studies that followed Alcohol, No Ordinary Commodity are examples. By creating interagency alcohol policy working groups and community coalitions with clear missions and operating charters, we take on these challenges as a routine part of the planning process. We expect to find a mess and make it better over time. Opposition is part of the landscape. We are in for the long haul; community-level prevention is never over and needs to be built into the fabric of local discourse.

Where do we stand today? In the United States, alcohol remains our most dangerous drug. It kills more people and does more damage than any other drug. Alcohol is also our most embedded drug, a routine part of daily life that hides in plain sight while having great social costs. Easy availability is taken for granted and discounted as an actionable cause. The industry does all it can to make alcohol an affordable item that is a routine part of daily activities. The state ABC agencies are weak and under industry influence. The local jurisdiction is the new frontline for prevention. City agencies and concerned community groups increasingly must take care of themselves. Advances in community prevention technology begun at ARG offer critical resources to this end. It is time for us (researchers, officials and advocates) to work better with each other in the prevention community and to reach out to allies and colleagues such as city planners and other city agencies, especially law enforcement and zoning/code compliance offices. We have made fractional progress on the many broad agendas created on your watch.

Throughout all this you continue to inspire and provide guidance on how to soldier on, so the work continues unbowed, if somewhat battered. Robin, thank you for all you’ve done, and may you keep on doing it for years and years to come.

Fried
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Michael Livingston

It’s hard to figure out what to write for this book of letters. I think back to 2006 and my arrival in Melbourne to work in a job that I had no idea how to do. Joining the dots between the researcher I was then and the one I am now, it’s clear that Robin’s influence on me and my career is hard to overstate.

Things got off to an odd start. I arrived bright and early, keen to make a good impression, only to discover that Robin was stuck at home on a teleconference call and wouldn’t be in until 10am. When we eventually sat down together, he welcomed me, gave me a pile of books and papers to read and told me he was about to jet off to Sweden for three weeks. Robin’s inexhaustible travelling has been a recurring theme of the last eight years, and his amazing efficiency in staying well connected through email became immediately clear once he’d landed.

Robin’s ability to find time for you amidst his hectic schedule is better illustrated by a story from later in my time in Melbourne. I’d slaved away for a few months putting the finishing touches on my first complete PhD draft just in time to deliver it to Robin before he headed overseas for a month. I printed it off and dropped it on his desk, looking forward to a lazy month free from PhD-related anxieties as Robin headed for Europe. By the time I woke up the next morning I had an eight-page email from Robin sent from Singapore airport stepping through the key weaknesses in my thesis and promising a marked-up copy of the whole document to follow in the mail. Incredible.

Robin’s amazing efficiency and seeming immunity to jetlag appear, sadly, to be unlearnable, but thankfully he’s been able to teach me many other things. I’m a better writer, a better thinker and a better researcher thanks to Robin’s patient editing, long conversations and thoughtful mentoring. I’m also the repository of hundreds of fascinating stories about alcohol research in the 1970s and Swedish cultural traditions.

The other thing I’ve loved watching and learning from is the way that Robin runs a research centre. He’s always accessible, endlessly encouraging, completely non-hierarchical and helpful to a fault. Watching him build our centre up has been inspiring—finding ways to bring out everyone’s strengths and turning shy and anxious junior researchers into shy and anxious mid-career researchers. No task is too small for him, no opinion unworthy of consideration and nobody too unimportant for his time.

While staff turnover in the rest of the field is furious, we’ve steadily accumulated staff, with almost no departures, a nice quantitative vindication of Robin’s ability to
foster a relaxed, enjoyable and stimulating working environment. He’s always got your back—nominating you for new and challenging roles, sticking up for you when you need it and always putting his staff’s satisfaction at the forefront of his concerns. I’ve never worked with such a supportive manager, perfectly exemplified by Robin regularly cheering us on at our netball finals wearing his very own replica orange T-shirt.

Robin has been recognised with prizes and awards all over the world, had an impact on policy, practice and research—he’s done all those things you need to do to be one of the most successful researchers in the field—but I think Robin’s real legacy is the four major research centres he’s fostered and developed and the innumerable staff, students and colleagues he has touched along the way. I, for one, can’t imagine how I’d have built any sort of career without him.
Vital Links that Sustain the Building of Knowledge

Robin: ‘In our field, the central question of administration is how to build, fund and sustain a creative environment for researchers.

‘During the 1990s my new boss, a hospital administrator, sent me on a training course for researchers who had become research managers. The course was led by psychologists from Harvard who had interesting things to ask and advise about how to facilitate a creative environment. But what really caught my attention was the common thread in the life story told by each of the twenty of us taking the course. We had all been good researchers and in the course of time and promotions had taken on the tasks of managing research teams or centres. But each of us had resisted for quite a while the idea of being a manager, which meant that we had been rather lousy at it. None of us had trained in administration; you just picked it up as you went along and did your best in the moment. Those twenty stories gave me a new respect for those who, one way or another, have become fine research administrators.

‘Fortunately, a career as the kind of research centre director and research entrepreneur that I have been involves ongoing connections with and getting help from many administrators and civil servants—agency heads, board of director members, doyens of the field, media specialists, development experts and fund raisers, and the all-important librarians and resource experts. They are the ones who work to turn our research findings into policies and legislation; they disseminate our findings to the public and apply them in service systems. Some are experts at shepherding a policy recommendation into a lasting reality. Some raise funds for our support and coach us in the realities of politics, funding and organisational goals and timetables. They are our links with everyday reality whom we rely on to keep us both realistic, and dreaming well while holding us to working with integrity.

‘There are also ongoing connections with fellow scholars which build the accumulation of knowledge without being in themselves research—for instance, working together on editing a scholarly journal, managing an award, serving on a grants panel and sustaining the networks, idea exchanges and occasional face-to-face meetings of groups like the Kettil Bruun Society and international research projects.

‘All these “administrative” connections have been a very important part of my life and are a pleasure to acknowledge and honour.’
Robin hired me to work at the Social Research Group in 1971. He didn’t mind that I would not give him the one-year commitment for which he asked. To me he was an adult, married, with three children and a house needing repair. Working life at SRG in the early 1970s was much like a family. We were a small group with a few of these ‘adults’, some graduate students and the rest of us just out of school finding a niche in the workplace.

One of the things I remember about Robin is that he rarely went out for lunch. Instead he brought a can of sardines or a sandwich and ate in his office or in the conference room, while he read a newspaper.

He was more knowledgeable than any other person I had met. You could ask him about literally anything and he would rattle on for four or five minutes, giving dates and references. In my early years he assisted me in my job—running the library. Library school was still in the future and cataloguing was foreign to me. Robin loved the library and was a great supporter of any of its needs, including assisting me in subject cataloguing in my early years. He knew the literature so well!

When he travelled he always brought back books he had picked up on his jaunts to used bookstores. He’d sometimes bring back as many as twenty books, ranging from historical books to those on alcohol in fiction or art, even old Tin Tin comics … lots of alcohol there. In doing so he made me more broadly aware of alcohol issues. The other thing he brought back for me was various pieces of Finnish stoneware. It was very expensive in the United States, but not in Finland. He brought back my soup tureen, a platter and other pieces. It was very sweet of him.

When we left 1912 Bonita in 1978 to move up to 1816 Scenic on Holy Hill—an old guest house designed by Julia Morgan for the Hearst family—Robin became the director, taking over from Don Cahalan. It was a huge old house with lots of bathrooms off the once-bedrooms, which we turned into offices. The bathtubs made great containers for the beer and wine for office parties.

Robin had the corner office on the north-east side. Oddly enough, he did not choose an office on the west side, which had beautiful views of the Bay. Robin’s office was always piled higher than one could imagine with books, newspapers, articles, old paper bags, more newspapers, and occasionally a ten-pound block of chocolate, with a knife on top for people to be able to chisel away when they came into his office. If he was worried about the outcome of an upcoming NIH site visit, Robin threw it all into temporary storage boxes and stashed them in the copious closets.
At any given time Robin was likely to be in the library having a debate with Walt Clark or Ron Roizen or a visiting scholar, of which we had many. His writing was generally done at night.

Because we had such great views of San Francisco Bay, and since Robin was always there late into the evening, he would often shout out to whomever else might still be working, ‘Sunset Watch!!’ Actually there often were quite a few folks around, as Robin’s work ethic was infectious. We would all convene on the roof balcony to watch the sun set behind the Golden Gate Bridge.

Robin taught me so much and gave me a job that became a career I came to love. I am forever grateful.

Virginia Chow

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CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Unjustly accused of obsessive hoarding, as are crows
How he finds everything—nobody knows.
To the rescue with an anecdote that persuades
Or a bright, shiny object buried for decades.
This binder, bought on sale and in his treasure trove for a bit
Has found its way to someone who loves it.

Thanks, Robin.
Some Memories of Robin Room

Unfailingly courteous, even when it was quite apparent that he thought his time was being wasted.

Deeply thoughtful and very fine company at lunches and dinners.

His published review of a meeting in Vienna of the uniformed, uninform ed, mostly hard-drinking, nicotine- and caffeine-addicted United Nations Drug Control Program warriors for a drug-free world was a masterpiece, deserving publication in Sunday Magazine.

Classically professorial in that office at the Addiction Research Foundation, he had a long table covered with papers, letters, articles in draft, reviews, reviews of reviews … and receipts.

On one of his academic journeyings (more about those later) his assistant decided to tackle the table and bring order to the piles, the contents and organisation of which Robin, to universal disbelief, insisted he understood and remembered. After a couple of days of delving and sorting the assistant emerged triumphant, waving a couple of cheques for some thousands of dollars—I forget from which academic institution or foundation—and also, if memory serves, a series of progressively litigious letters from some organisation’s legal body demanding restitution for some perceived academic slight or another unpaid bill.

In those days he was somewhat corpulent, and also rumpled. But with gravitas.

He also travelled a lot. More than anyone I had come across. I learned early in my days at ARF that few scholars had as much travel dollar access as those in the field of alcohol policy research. In fact my favourite game at ARF’s annual Christmas party was ‘Where, in the world, is Robin Room?’ Talented staff would bring out maps and the game would be on. Another skit was a version of ‘Where’s Waldo?’

All that ended when the Ontario Hospital Restructuring Commission ordered that ARF merge with (be acquired by) the Clark Institute of Psychiatry. Neither Robin nor I lasted very long after that. And I suspect that he, like me, has very few regrets.

Salut, Robin! My only regret is that we weren’t able to continue what I at least thought was an interesting partnership in attempting to rationalise drug policy.

Best wishes for the future.
Dear Robin,

For some unstated reason, your colleagues are inviting letters from your friends and colleagues, to be incorporated into a Festschrift. I was puzzled, because I couldn’t think of why anyone would want to prepare a Festschrift to you. Everybody knows that a Festschrift is dedicated to an ageing German professor as he contemplates relinquishing his Chair to a seventy-five-year-old youngster, and neither of those conditions seemed to apply.

How would you like to get a collection of letters in praise of Herr Professor Doktor Rotkehlchen Zimmer? It just doesn’t fit—it isn’t you. And the second condition is even worse: it sounds as though they were confident you would eventually retire, or are they are planning to ship you off to Sweden again, or to Russia, or to Berkeley, of all places! Beware of such friends! You are much too young and mentally lively to think of retiring, and if they plan to ship you to Berkeley it might be to make you finally take that PhD you never did in particle physics, or even one in the neurobiology of addiction!

Come to think of it, maybe they’re onto something after all. You have a background in English, sociology, epidemiology, economics, public health policy, participatory anthropology—you name it. So what do you get for the man who has everything? Obviously, just the thing: a PhD in particle physics, or better still in the neurobiology of addiction! So now I can see the logic of the Festschrift: it’s to motivate you to turn your mind to something really substantial and socially important; to complete the picture, as it were.

After all, you are a promising young lad. You’re highly intelligent (and then some!), charming, collegial, imaginative, eloquent, productive, adventurous (look at all the places you’ve worked!), principled, equipped with a strong social conscience. All things considered, you’re really very well prepared to start a first-class career. So a Festschrift it is, after all! I salute you and encourage you to really go for it. The door’s open, the road’s clear. Go out and show them what you can do. And when you come back with those physics and biology PhDs we’ll show you a real rouser of a celebration.

All jokes aside, Robin, it’s a pleasure and a privilege to work with you, and I wish you the very best on this and all future such occasions.

Harold
Jakob Lindberg
...............................................
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

I am not a researcher myself, but for some years I belonged to the Board of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs at the University of Stockholm, which was then headed by Robin. He played a vital role in creating and strengthening this centre, and the discussions I had with Robin were always informative and stimulating.

Antoni Gual
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BARCELONA, SPAIN

I started to work in the alcohol field in the early 1980s when Robin Room was already a recognised scientist. I read him, but didn’t have the chance to meet him until a few years later. Surprisingly, Robin turned out to be much younger than I expected. Since then I’ve had the privilege of having him on the global advisory committee of the ALICE RAP project.¹ His enthusiasm, commitment and wisdom make me think that he is becoming younger, not older.

So, I guess you’re not retiring, Robin, but you still deserve very many congratulations for your outstanding contributions, and many thanks for your continuous support.

¹ When Robin was asked what ALICE RAP stands for, he said ‘I don’t actually know, but it’s an ambitious project about many aspects of addiction in Europe. The A is probably Addiction’. Google reveals it is the Addiction and Life Styles in Contemporary Europe: Reframing Addictions Project. So, careful reader, take a few moments to exult in your knowing something Robin doesn’t.
I am delighted to have the opportunity to formally express my admiration of Robin and my gratitude for his guidance and collegiality.

In early 2006 I heard that a ‘big name’ alcohol researcher had been recruited to Melbourne. I did not dare dream that it might be Robin, so I was delighted when the coup was announced soon after.

Very soon after arriving, Robin kindly agreed to co-supervise a PhD student, Brett Maclellan, with me. Robin made vital contributions to Brett’s work on local government alcohol policy in New Zealand and is an investigator on a successful Health Research Council grant, to be announced soon, for a project evaluating the new alcohol legislation there. This is a major achievement for public health in a country ravaged by severe budget cuts and neo-liberal ideology. Robin’s unwavering support over the last eight years has been crucial.

I am constantly amazed at Robin’s incisive, timely input into so many important, complex research projects and public policy debates. I have had the privilege of serving with Robin on a small charitable trust, where his contributions have been much admired and appreciated. I have observed the high esteem in which he is held in the Kettil Bruun Society. He has done fabulous work as Editor in Chief of Drug and Alcohol Review. And of course, there is the legacy of his hundreds of research papers and books as well as the many PhD scholars he has mentored.

I am so glad that we are celebrating Robin’s contributions. I feel very fortunate to have had the benefit of his wisdom.

No letter can match the contribution of Robin’s generosity, intellect and rigour, not just to the field of alcohol and other drug research, but to the world more generally.

His incisive eye unfolds every crease and considers every detail. With tact and insight he writes a long essay about how the world might look if the writer took a different standpoint.
But his remarkable dissection of the world pales when compared to his way with words. For Robin, writing seems more natural than breathing, especially the way he twists words about to convey meaning. It is this talent that I find most intimidating in Robin and why I am loath to write this letter. But it is why I must write. He has inspired me to write and to write well.

Thank you, Robin.

Steve Allsop

PERTH, AUSTRALIA

Robin Room has had an enormous influence on my career. His early work on disease concepts and separately on intoxication, the law and public health resonated and enticed me into the field. More than three decades later, his work, variously on the burden of disease, alcohol policy and the costs of the marginalisation of people affected by drug use, still engages and influences me. Long may it continue!

John Saunders

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Over the Years with Robin

When I gave my first presentation on an alcohol and drug topic in 1976, there was an eminent researcher whom I quoted extensively. He was Robin Room, who had undertaken some of the first national surveys of alcohol use in the United States and was also recognised as an incisive commentator on the many influences in our society on the uptake and increase in alcohol consumption. Some years later, when I became involved in the work of the World Health Organization, Robin was as a scientist of world stature involved in many WHO initiatives, particularly when a cross-cultural perspective was important because the applicability of concepts and
measurement techniques across cultures was crucial to the work of a global organisation. Later, in the early 1990s, Robin was the scientific director of a major component of the work of the WHO National Institutes of Health Joint Project on Diagnosis and Classification. I have known Robin throughout these years and see him as one of the greatest contributors to our understanding of alcohol and drug problems and how as a society we can best respond to them. He has always been that ‘eminent person’ and yet has conveyed his encyclopedic knowledge and scholarship in a way that encourages rather than daunts, and supports rather than dispirits.

The list of Robin’s achievements would take a volume in itself. I have never been sure how he packs so much into his day but I have some evidence that he requires less in the way of sleep than most of us. About twenty years ago I had written the draft of a paper but was a little uncertain about whether some of the points I was making were entirely valid. I asked Robin if he would review it for me if he could find the time. This was at the end of a WHO Advisory Committee Meeting and he said he was leaving at 5am the following morning to get an early flight home. It was then 12.30am and I said, ‘If you could get a few comments to me in the next few days that would be great’. When I surfaced in the morning at about 8am, I found the draft paper pushed under my door with detailed written comments from Robin in his usual incisive style. How on earth does he do this? I asked. But he did. The topic was quite different to the subject of the meeting and no doubt he had many other things to do, not least pack his suitcase for a transatlantic flight.

This is typical of Robin—just as I have experienced him over nearly four decades. His contributions are universally recognised: he won the Jellinek Award in 1983, and has influenced policy and programs everywhere he has worked.

Robin grew up on Sydney’s North Shore. I have walked with him through the grounds of his old house, dominated by a rare stand of Sydney high gums and casuarina trees. I did not imagine that he would return to Australia, but it has been a wonderful experience for us and has allowed him to make a huge contribution to alcohol prevention work here to match what he has done worldwide.
Dear Robin,

I feel honoured being numbered among your many friends and colleagues who have been invited to be in Melbourne in September to recognise you and your contributions to the drug and alcohol field. Regrettably, I am unable to attend, as Pat and I will be overseas. I anticipate the event will be a resounding success.

I greatly appreciate and value our relationship, which spans almost thirty-five years, from when you were in Berkeley, later at the Addiction Research Foundation in Ontario and more recently since your return to Australia. I admire your ability and tenacity to cope with and prosper from the opportunities and demands of professional and geographical change, particularly since 1998—Canada’s unnecessary, sad loss being Australia’s unexpected, fortunate gain.

As a colleague you have contributed much to my understanding of our field and assisted me in my work. Thank you for your friendship.

Best wishes to Gretchen and you,

Jim Rankin
My tribute to Robin springs from the unusual relationship I had with him over seven years, from 2006 to 2013, while he was alcohol policy research expert and I was the bureaucrat in charge of alcohol policy in the Victorian government. Over time I played many roles: both as Robin’s student and his adviser, as his critic and the target of his influence, as his advocate and his judge, and as his interpreter and, quite awkwardly for us both, the overseer of his contract.

Now bureaucrats and the role they play in adapting research ideas into good government can be misunderstood in the academic world. Researchers are experts, and bureaucrats are practitioners, and some researchers see the role of practitioners as ‘translating research into practice’. In this view bureaucrats more often than not lose the idea in the translation, and researchers succeed if their ideas are adopted by governments.

Robin, however, was wiser than that. He always appreciated the subtlety and depth of the problems that alcohol presents to society, to researchers and to governments. The cultural meanings and social uses of this chemical substance have, after all, sustained a lifetime of inquiry for Robin. Discussions about alcohol policy with Robin were exchanges of ideas, and, as a result, his influence on alcohol policy was much more profound than merely the adoption of particular proposals or the repetition of claims: his dialogues generated new ideas and creative disagreement.

Over the seven years we worked together, alcohol policy was an arena of turbulent debate and many difficulties for governments. Decisions encountered fierce resistance, not only from the usual suspects but from protests on the street. At times it was rather reminiscent of Gladstone’s statement that his government was ‘washed away in a torrent of beer and gin’. And so, over the seven years, I had many, many occasions to call or email Robin with questions or nagging doubt or the occasional desperate plea for wise counsel plus a bit of real scholarship to inform decision-making and the political calculations of governing.

Robin’s advice always had the true quality of a humble scholar. I remember I once called him—soon after the alcopops tax was introduced—to try to make sense of some befuddled papers on complex regulatory schemes to promote low-alcohol wine. ‘How can you get people to drink lower alcohol wine?’ I asked Robin. ‘Just add water’, he replied.

Earthy, simple, astute, observant—Robin is ever the true sociologist.
The Room Project

In 2006, Robin Room returned to Australia, not on this occasion for a flying visit but
to take up a position as the inaugural director of the Melbourne-based Centre for
Alcohol Policy Research, a body established jointly by the Foundation for Alcohol
Research and Education, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, the University of
Melbourne and the Victorian government. As this list of institutions suggests, Robin’s
return was the result of quite a lot of collaborative effort. Here is how it happened.

Credit for the idea of enticing Australia’s most renowned alcohol researcher back
to the land of his birth probably belongs in the first instance to Professor Margaret
Hamilton, who in the early years of this century was preparing to exit from her role as
founder director of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre. Looking back now,
Margaret recalls that in the course of developing Turning Point as a centre that
combined clinical service, policy development, education, training and research, she
became aware of a critical shortage of senior researchers in Melbourne capable of
mentoring new alcohol and drug researchers. She decided to pursue seriously an
idea that, she now recalls, she had been harbouring for some time: getting Robin
back to Australia.

At the time, Robin was based in Sweden as Director of the Centre for Social
Research on Alcohol and Drugs at Stockholm University. Margaret added a side trip
to Stockholm to an already planned trip to Dublin, dined with Robin and his wife,
Gretchen, and asked him bluntly: ‘What would it take to get you back to Australia?’

Back in Melbourne, she began looking for institutional and financial support,
holding discussions with, among others, senior staff at the University of Melbourne,
the then Victorian Minister for Health (‘I stressed what a coup it would be for Victoria
if Robin could be attracted to Melbourne’), and directors of what later became the
Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, but was known at the time as the
Alcohol Education and Research Foundation.

This last piece of networking was particularly timely. AERF had been established
in 2001 by the Australian parliament and tasked with disbursing as grants $115
million, originally collected by the government as an excise on draught beer that was
subsequently blocked by the Senate. Under an agreement negotiated between the
government of the day and the Australian Democrats in the Senate, it was agreed
that the money collected should be used to fund programs and research aimed at
preventing harms caused by alcohol and volatile substance misuse. An Act enabling
the arrangement stipulated that at least 80 per cent of the money was to be allocated over the first four years.

By 2005, AERF had discharged this obligation. In doing so, directors (including both of us) and staff had become well aware of the need for an organisation with an ongoing commitment to conducting research and advocating evidence-based policies and programs to combat alcohol-related problems. The question for AERF directors at the time was: how can we best pursue this goal? Margaret’s idea of luring Robin Room back fell upon receptive ears, and what AERF’s then CEO Daryl Smeaton dubbed the ‘Researcher of Outstanding Merit (ROOM) project’ was born. In the following months, further negotiations involving AERF, the Victorian government, the University of Melbourne and Turning Point led to the formation of what was initially known as the AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research.

Since then the centre, under Robin’s leadership, has lifted research and alcohol policy development to new levels. We will content ourselves with just three examples. An early project overseen by Robin was an appraisal by the team at Turning Point of the effectiveness of the AERF (FARE) funding program. By this time, AERF (FARE) had funded several hundred programs, some very large, some small and local. What lessons could we learn from this for future decision-making? The findings from this project promised not only to inform the future directions of AERF (FARE) but also to guide the decisions of other funding bodies. A sample of 127 projects funded over a six-year period was examined, using an evaluation approach that was refreshingly innovative for such a complex task. The research showed that genuine partnerships with other organisations, communities and consumers characterised the most successful community projects.

Robin then persuaded AERF (FARE) of the need to fill a major gap in alcohol research on the social impacts of alcohol. Evidence of this kind, he said, would be an important addition to future alcohol policy. Thus was born the research program Alcohol’s Hidden Costs—The Range and Magnitude of Alcohol’s Harm to Others. The research made explicit what everyone working at the frontline knew: that alcohol harmed people other than the drinker—strangers, fellow workers, family members, children and friends. AERF (FARE) encouraged the research group to estimate the total dollar costs of these harms, taking into account the 2008 work of David Collins and Helen Lapsley. The total annual cost of alcohol’s cost to others was conservatively estimated to be $36 billion.

These data on the harms to others—social and economic costs—should reshape society’s views about alcohol, especially about the damage to communities, families and children, to shift from a focus primarily on health to wider community and social issues. That the World Health Organization and other countries are now building on this work comes as no surprise to us.

True to his leadership and selflessness, Robin ensured the publications arising from this work properly recognised the team effort that it was.
From 2006 to 2012, Robin was prepared to stand outside the academy to take on the Presidency of the Alcohol and Other Drug Council of Australia, succeeding Neal Blewett, former Australian Minister for Health. This was another example of his generous contribution to our civil society. In this role he helped resolve some difficult issues in the relationship between non-government organisations and government. It was a time during which the Commonwealth government needed advice and support. The excise rate on ready-to-drink premixed spirits, ‘alcopops’, was increased by 70 per cent in 2008, the first time alcohol taxation had been used specifically as a health measure in Australia, and at the same time the National Medical and Health Research Council developed new criteria for drinking guidelines. Robin contributed his expertise to all these areas.

These few instances demonstrate the difference Robin’s return to Australia has made to our community, a small part of his international contributions.

In 2012, Robin was honoured with the Prime Minister’s Award for his outstanding contribution to the alcohol and other drugs field in Australia in the National Drug and Alcohol Awards.
A FARE Perspective on Robin Room

The evolution of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education from a grant-making organisation to a strong and unifying voice in Australia’s alcohol debate might have been possible without Robin Room. But it would have been a lot more difficult.

Since 2010 the relationship between FARE and the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, and particularly with Robin as its director, has enabled FARE to develop effective policies and advocate persuasively for alcohol policy reform in Australia. Robin’s standing as one of the world’s leading alcohol policy researchers is central to any success FARE can claim in its difficult work of persuading governments to tackle Australia’s severe problems with alcohol.

FARE is especially proud of commissioning CAPR’s current significant work, the ongoing study titled Alcohol’s Harm to Others, which measures third-party harms from alcohol use. This research could well be the pivotal point in achieving policy change, in the same way discovering the health risks of passive smoking played a central role in the debate over the regulation of tobacco products. Alcohol’s Harm to Others is a world-first research project that places CAPR at the forefront of informed alcohol policy development, both in Australia and internationally.

Robin’s input, influence and renown is the bedrock of FARE’s policy development and advocacy work. He is our research guru. His and CAPR’s independence and commitment to produce the best evidence-based alcohol policy research in the world give FARE the confidence and credibility to pursue its agenda.

The FARE staff benefit enormously from Robin’s deep experience and intellectual vigour. He gives freely of his time to provide advice and counsel, and is always willing to have robust and detailed discussions on the intersection of research, policy and advocacy.

As a sociologist Robin brings different perspectives to some of the contentious issues FARE deals with, and as an epidemiologist he can interpret data and help FARE place its work into context.

FARE relies on Robin’s ability to direct research towards productive output and his great insights into the history of complex alcohol issues. He continually pushes research boundaries and explores different issues to answer the questions policy-makers ask in trying to find solutions to alcohol’s harms.

It was a privilege to work with Robin on the FARE-initiated book project titled Vital Links that Sustain the Building of Knowledge.
Stemming the Tide of Alcohol. He was the ship’s rudder, keeping matters in perspective, challenging chapter authors on their methodology, content, intent, insights and conclusions and helping to produce a first-class result.

Stemming the Tide of Alcohol is an example of what FARE is trying to achieve. It demonstrates the importance of research translation and makes a volume of relevant information widely available for people in all locations to act on.

Robin’s integrity and personal qualities of helpfulness, openeness and enthusiasm for inquiry have enabled him to attract and mentor young researchers who might not have chosen alcohol as their field if not for his reputation. New, keen young minds in alcohol research will greatly benefit future generations. This may well be one of Robin’s greatest legacies.

Brian Vandenberg for APC

MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

In Victoria, All Roads Lead to Room

Robin Room was a founding member of the Victorian Alcohol Policy Coalition and the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, and his contribution to alcohol policy advocacy during this time has been legendary. The APC was formed in 2008 at a time when alcohol policy in Victoria, and indeed across the nation, had come to prominence in public and political debate. We witnessed an emerging media frenzy surrounding youth binge drinking and alcohol-fuelled violence pushing governments into reactive policy-making, spurring the alcohol industry into defensive and offensive action, and demanding a greater tactical response from alcohol policy advocates than ever before. It was a heady time to be working in alcohol policy.

The hullabaloo and commotion about alcopop taxes, late-night lockouts and the ‘two drinks is a binge’ guidelines was enthusing but sometimes overwhelming. Fortunately, somebody was looking over our shoulder, keeping our heads cool and steering us on the road towards evidence-based policy rather than policy-based evidence. That somebody was Robin Room. Robin was always able to cut through the calamity and controversy of alcohol policy debates occurring in the media and politics frenzy with sensible, nuanced and always respectful insight and advice. When he speaks, we listen. And when he finishes speaking we usually need a bit more time to ponder everything he’s just said.
Robin’s encyclopedic knowledge of the science and art of alcohol policy-making is unrivalled, and it is constantly humbling to have him in our presence. To have him here in Australia, and participating in our very own alcohol policy coalition, must surely seem like an extravagance to the scholars and advocates in other parts of the world who can only admire him from afar; and access him by email or catch him on one of those trips away!

What he enjoys most, and does best, is wrestle with the intellectual questions in alcohol policy that we confront. He does this not in a pretentious or self-indulgent way but practically and generously.

While Robin’s international achievements and his global standing in alcohol policy and research are colossal, this has never compromised his genuine commitment to and tight focus on alcohol policy back home. The modest advances in alcohol policy reform we’ve enjoyed in Victoria and other parts of Australia over the past half-decade don’t properly reflect the impact Robin has had. Perhaps one of the greatest unintended compliments he’s been paid was the frustrated admission by alcohol industry lobbyists that when Australian governments go in search of advice on evidence-based alcohol policy—‘all roads lead to Room’.

Jerril Rechter for VicHealth

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Robin has made a magnificent contribution to the issue of alcohol misuse in Victoria and through his expertise also to VicHealth.

Robin’s contribution to the field of alcohol harm reduction is difficult to overstate. Whether through pioneering work establishing the relationship between alcohol consumption and elevated risk of chronic health conditions or injury from an occasion of drinking, or detailing the full extent of the harm caused by another person’s drinking, Robin has continued to expand upon our understanding of this issue that has a profound impact upon our society.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Robin for the generosity he has shown toward VicHealth staff both past and present in sharing his expertise. Just as he has done with the broader alcohol harm reduction sector, Robin has often provided guidance and direction to VicHealth on issues of alcohol regulation and legislation, and also on the sociological considerations of the role alcohol plays in the lives of Victorians.
The image I have of Robin, having worked with him these past four years, is of the deceptively simple appearance of an elderly but spry gentleman. To me he is the ‘wise old soul’, a Professor undoubtedly, with all the idiosyncratic features of a very learned man. His calm, quiet demeanour completely disguises an exhausting work ethic, a travelling schedule that would challenge that of a Secretary of State and a razor sharp strategic view that underpins his longstanding and illustrious contribution to his field. His reputation speaks for itself.

His OFFICE, however, is another story entirely. It is the challenge of every health and safety inspection and accreditation survey. It’s jam-packed with papers. I fear that one day we will lose Robin completely in an avalanche of paper. But so far I trust that he is still there, among the stacks and stacks of precariously leaning documents because I can see his blinking computer monitor, assurance that there is a living presence somewhere within.

In my time here I have made numerous offers of practical assistance to help clear up the office. All have been met with a consistent and ever-so polite, ‘No, no, it’s okay; I know exactly where everything is’.

Another of Robin’s unique features is that he is one of the few people I know who walk gently on this planet, with a shirt-pocket-size diary, and a virtual absence of a mobile phone, iPad or laptop. He does have a printer somewhere, I am sure of it; I just can’t quite see it, as it too has been hidden by the paper stacks. Robin’s only concession to the modern era, as far as I can tell, is his desktop computer, but its age would render it an excellent addition to landfill.

A brilliant man, a consummate gentleman, with an office that screams ‘FIRE ALERT’.
Dan Lubman for Turning Point

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

I am never quite sure where Robin actually is in the world, but wherever he may be you can bet he will be online and providing an emergency scientific response service. No matter what country, time zone or hour, if an email goes out asking for Robin’s input, an email will arrive back in your inbox almost before you’ve sent it, providing sage and informed advice. This is one of the things that make Robin such a valued colleague and contributor: his freely given wise counsel and in-depth scientific critiques on a wide range of topics across the alcohol and drug field. ‘How about this?’ one may ask, only to hear, ‘Oh, we did that in 1975 and identified that …’ ‘Well what about …?’ ‘Well, that didn’t work in Canada/Sweden. I think you might try this …’

We have been uniquely fortunate to have Robin here with us in Australia, and particularly at Turning Point, where he has built a team of bright, highly talented young researchers who are continuing to elevate the alcohol policy debate in Australia and overseas. His presence has helped raise the international prestige of Australian research.

We look forward to working with Robin for many more years, and feel safe in the knowledge that he cannot leave until he clears his desk, which as you may be aware, is a life’s work.
MASH episode

Hawkeye conspires to send Radar off to Seoul to lose his virginity. He gets arrested on the way. Hawkeye gets drunk to drown his anger & guilt. Tash wakes up after 2 hr. sleep & has to leave operating room to throw up. Gets lectured by commander & by Radar—he gets his back up & yells at Radar. Hot Lips others lecture him. He goes to apologize to Radar. They meet at sweetheart bar. Radar comments to Hawkeye he hasn’t been around. “Been staying away from the firewater” “What’s the matter with your liver?” “No.” He & Radar have a stiff conversation about the weather. Ultimately wake up. Radar orders grapefruit soda. Hawkeye a beer. After waking up Hawkeye reaches across & swaps his drink with Radar.

From Robin’s 1982 alcohol in television notes
Robin: ‘The concept of long waves reappeared in both our Alcohol in Films project and in my Literary Drunks papers from the early 1980s. I have an ongoing interest in authors I call “literary drunks”, perhaps because as an undergraduate I left physics to major in English and then earned a Masters degree in English literature. Based on my own reading, I made a chart of the well-known American authors who had a reputation for being heavy drinkers and found most were born in 1888–1900, which led me to ask if there were other generations of writers with their own distinct drinking patterns.

‘Our film work built on the Finns’ previous studies. Denise Herd and I watched dozens of films. We co-sponsored an exhilarating Alcohol in Films Festival with Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley and wrote papers, including two we presented at an international Alcohol and Films conference in 1983 in Paris. I first learned to do qualitative field work and analysis by taking notes while watching films.

‘This interest in learning about the life and work and drinking patterns of literary drunks, as well as documenting how images of drinking changed in films of different decades, led to my studies of how drinking practices change from one generation to the next in a society and to studies of the drinking patterns and cirrhosis patterns of different generations. I have been involved in studies of cultural difference, helped, of course, by my having worked in five countries on three different continents. I have always been interested in how change occurs in patterns like these long waves, and in how hard it is to make change happen when and where we want it to. I bring that interest to every piece of my work.’
Maria Abrahamson
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Dear Robin,

You generous, helpful, inclusive, warm-hearted child of the ’60s—thank you for the stimulating and fruitful years you were our boss at SoRAD! All the best for the years to come.

Maria Abrahamson

Matilda Hellman
HELSINKI, FINLAND

Robin is fun and reliable as a person, friend and colleague. (Un)fortunately, he has suffered from the condition of ‘serious intellectual curiosity’ all his life. As I have more recently caught the malady, I use him as a valuable source of information on how the condition progresses and how to live with it and deal with it in everyday life.

Robin has chosen to accept it, and make the best of it. I aim to do the same—and in any case the course of events will be similar for me: my future could not look more bright and joyful!

Thank you, Robin, for letting me be your friend and colleague.

Sidsel Eriksen
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

I am sorry to say that because I have to do general social and political history for my university I have not had the research time to finish my project on the history of Danish alcohol politics. However, Robin’s work and international knowledge of the field has been extremely inspiring for me. Have a nice celebration, and greetings from Sidsel!
I have numerous fine recollections of lively discussions with Robin while I worked together with him and others on a major World Health Organization project. But here I will focus on Robin’s contributions to alcohol studies and anthropology by mentioning two specific things.

The first is a four-day international conference held in Waigani, Papua New Guinea, in March 1981 as part of a two-year alcohol project funded by the PNG government through the Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research. I was hired to direct IASER’s Alcohol Project and the above-mentioned conference provided an opportunity to convene a wide group of scholars (mostly anthropologists) to share information on the place of alcoholic beverages in the PNG communities in which they had previously worked. I had become acquainted with Robin some years before and invited him to serve as the general discussant for the conference. He performed that role superbly, enriching the conversations during the conference and helping to place the PNG situation in a broader international context. An outgrowth of the conference was a 482-page monograph called Through a Glass Darkly: Beer and Modernization in Papua New Guinea (1982), to which Robin contributed an excellent chapter, offering what he called ‘a view from the outside’. The IASER monograph greatly increased our pool of knowledge on alcohol and culture in Oceania, and it had the added value of being assembled specifically in the service of public policy decisions about alcohol in PNG. Robin’s knowledge and assistance regarding public policy issues was invaluable.

A second major contribution Robin made to alcohol studies and anthropology was to publish a highly stimulating article in Current Anthropology, one of the discipline’s major journals. The question he posed there of whether anthropologists routinely underestimated alcohol-related problems in their ethnographic studies produced a lively debate. The debate was joined right along with the journal article in a series of published comments that immediately followed Robin’s text and it then reverberated through subsequent argument and reference in and out of print. Robin’s article forced anthropologists like me to think long and hard about how we presented our material and the effects such presentation might have on alcohol policy.

In sum, although he was trained in sociology, Robin Room also has cultivated a keen interest in anthropology and his cross-disciplinary reading and writings such as those mentioned above have strengthened alcohol and culture studies.
I can truly say that without Robin’s academic influence through his writing, I probably would have ended up doing something else in life. As a young PhD student conducting field research in an Indigenous Australian residential alcohol and drug treatment centre, I often felt very alone. Yes, I was doing fieldwork in an environment that was very different to my regular university life. This is not a very unique experience, as many anthropologists feel out of place at times during their fieldwork. However, I felt out of place because of the very specific focus of my work.

Many of my fellow PhD students working in Australia were conducting research in Aboriginal communities documenting various aspects of social and cultural life. It seemed exotic; they talked of long road trips through country, learning foreign languages, sleeping out under the stars, collecting life histories, ancient stories and genealogies—the ‘real’ anthropological experience as described by first year anthropology textbooks. Issues such as alcohol misuse, racism and poverty were largely kept out of our studies. In the field I found myself in a very different environment, where people had gone through the most unimaginable pain. They came from shattered pasts, their lives fractured by violence, imprisonment and racism. Alcohol and drugs provided both a way out of these pains and in turn sustained them. Their lives, however, were pierced and grounded by a strong sense of identity, belonging to country and a determined willingness to make things better for themselves, their families and their communities.

I was conducting field research in Australia’s first Indigenous residential treatment centre for Aboriginal people with substance misuse problems. And I was attempting to tell a story not only about Benelong’s Haven residents’ fight against alcohol but also about their efforts to take control of the discourses surrounding alcohol and Indigenous peoples. At the time of my fieldwork, there was very little literature about the damaging impact of alcohol on Aboriginal communities and individuals; neither had there been any focus on Aboriginal people’s own efforts to combat alcohol problems. The anthropological texts on the subject had generally tried to make sense of Aboriginal alcohol use in its own right, focusing on the social and cultural rules of alcohol use and so on. In documenting the devastating impact of alcohol I found what the residents of Benelong’s Haven told me impossible to fit into the classic mould. Perhaps I would not be able to make sense of any of the broken stories that were being told to me.

Perhaps this feeling that my own work was at odds with the current literature was a sign of future problems in the reception of my work—I could imagine the
critiques of my examiners before me. Perhaps I should find something else to do in life. I then rediscovered Robin’s 1984 article in *Current Anthropology*, ‘Alcohol and Ethnography: A Case of Problem Deflation?’ This was life changing for me and my work. No need to provide an in-depth review of this article here; I am sure most reading this are familiar with much of Robin’s published work. What was important to me was that this article, which was critical of the current ethnographic literature on alcohol because it reflected a ‘concurrence of various assumptions, methods and theoretical orientations’, gave me the all important push to realise that what I was doing was indeed important and legitimate. Robin’s article provided a *raison d’être* for my whole project. What I hope I produced in the end was a story that engaged with the devastating impacts of Indigenous alcohol misuse on the lives of residents admitted to Benelong’s Haven, but also a narrative that discussed how this group of people created their own way out of these problems.

I don’t think I have ever thanked Robin for his encouragement that I received from afar, so I thank him here. Robin did write a review of my book, a review that was very kind. His conclusions based on the ideas presented in my book were far more insightful than my own.

Since coming to the University of Melbourne in 2010, I have had the opportunity to engage with Robin and the team of researchers who work alongside him. I have been struck by his unlimited knowledge of all things alcohol related, his kind and giving spirit and his ability to create a supportive and collegiate environment. Working in ever-harsher academic climates, Robin is a model of someone who is dedicated to the work he cares about. I have no idea what the secret is to his formidable publishing record; however, I am hoping he will spend enough time here that we can learn the answer from him.

**Denise Herd**

*BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA*

I was going through old files and happened on notes and photos from an alcohol film project that Robin and I and others from the Alcohol Research Group developed in the early 1980s. This material brought back memories of Robin’s enthusiasm and support for all things cultural related to alcohol. We created an alcohol film festival with the Pacific Film Archive at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote copious notes about alcohol in American films and television, attended international meetings
in France and Finland and published articles on the role of alcohol in the movies. I was a graduate student at the time and Robin’s support and mentorship for a project of this kind provided an incredible opportunity to pursue my interests in alcohol and popular culture. The project was one of the early roots of my current career focus on the role and portrayal of alcohol, drugs and social problems in rap music.

Below is the press release for the film series. I also found in my files a page of handwritten notes that Robin wrote about alcohol in a MASH episode in May 1982. (MASH was an American situation comedy about soldiers in the Korean War.) This is just a sample of the many notes that Robin wrote on television, and the movies of the 1920s though to the 1980s for the project. (See p.104 and p.115.)

Hawkeye conspires to send Radar off to Seoul to lose his virginity. Radar gets wounded on the way. Hawkeye gets drunk to drown his anger and guilt. Then he wakes up after two hours of sleep, still drunk and has to leave the operating room to throw up. Hawkeye is lectured by the commander and by Radar—he gets his back up and yells at Radar. The Commander, nurse Hot Lips and others lecture him about this, while Radar worships him. He goes to apologise, Radar chews him out. When Radar is up again, they meet at Rosie’s bar. Rosie comments to Hawkeye he hasn’t been around. ‘Been staying away from the firewater.’ ‘What’s the matter, trouble with your liver?’ ‘No.’ He and Radar have a stiff conversation about the weather, eventually make up. Radar has ordered a grapefruit Nehio, Hawkeye a beer. After making up, Hawkeye reaches across and swaps his drink with Radar.

Helen Matzger

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA

I am delighted to have been contacted about Robin’s festivities. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend given the distance! However, I would like to say a few words about Robin. Robin and I worked together during a very small window of time in our lives. Our paths crossed while I was working at the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley. I can barely remember what we authored a paper together about.

That said, I remember Robin as being one of the warmest, most encouraging people at that point in my young career. As a mother of two, scrambling to work and adjust to family life, Robin encouraged me to keep up both my family and my work life. While I remember him being whip smart and of great intellect, I mainly remember him for that warmth and encouragement for someone so much his junior. I have
U.C. Berkeley Press Release

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

IMAGES OF ALCOHOL IN AMERICAN FILM, 1909-1960
A special four-program series presented by
the Pacific Film Archive in cooperation with
the Alcohol Research Group

In cooperation with the Alcohol Research Group, the University Art Museum’s Pacific Film Archive, located at 2621 Durant Avenue in Berkeley, will present a series of four February programs studying Images of Alcohol in American Film from 1909 to 1960. The cinema has reflected and has helped to shape cultural attitudes in this country, and the 11 films in this series present a number of fascinating and often-ambiguous attitudes of Hollywood and American society toward Prohibition, the influence of drink on families and careers, social drinking and the politics of alcohol.

The series begins at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 3 with Joan Crawford in her first starring role in OUR DANCING DAUGHTERS (1928), a lavishly MGM celebration of champagne and the Charleston. OUR DANCING DAUGHTERS associates drinking with glamorous night life and emancipated flappers during the Jazz Age. D. W. Griffith’s last film, THE STRUGGLE (1931), to be shown at 9:25 p.m. that evening, portrays the financial difficulties that drive a working-class New Yorker to drink.

At 7 p.m. Tuesday, February 9th, Mae West and George Raft star in NIGHT AFTER NIGHT (1932), an entertaining gangster film about a speakeasy owner in the final years of Prohibition. NIGHT AFTER NIGHT will be shown in an archival-quality 35mm print, followed at 9 p.m. by THE WET PARADE, a 1932 family drama which reflects America’s ambivalent attitudes toward the politics of alcohol during the final years of Prohibition.

One of the best-known films about drinking, BILLY WILDER’s THE LOST WEEKEND (1945), stars Ray Milland as a failed writer who uses alcohol as an escape. It will be shown at 7 p.m. Tuesday, February 16. Then at 9 p.m. that evening, THE SUN ALSO RISES (1957), starring Tyrone Power, Ava Gardner and Mel Ferrer, will be screened. According to Ernest Hemingway, whose novel formed the basis of the film, THE SUN ALSO RISES is “a splashy Cook’s Tour of Europe’s lost generation bistros, bullfights and more bistros.”

The series concludes on Tuesday, February 23rd with GEORGE CUKOR’s 1954 version of A STAR IS BORN, starring Judy Garland as a singer on the rise married to James Mason, an alcoholic movie idol. At 9:45 on the 23rd Fritz Lang’s wonderful thriller WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS, starring Dana Andrews, Ida Lupino and George Sanders, will be shown. According to Denise Herd of the Alcohol Research Group, a non-profit research and training organization, WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS “illustrates the sleek, heavy-normalized drinking which appeared in the films of the Fifties” in a fast-paced plot dealing with murder and ambitious newsmen.

General admission to the film screenings is $3, with a $1 surcharge for the second program on a double-bill. For further information, please phone 642-1412.
eventually ended up back in the global health field, always my first love, and it is partly due to Robin, who gladly encouraged me to go after my interests and passion.

Thanks, Robin, and congratulations on all your achievements: imparting kindness is surely one of the most noble.

Sarah MacLean

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MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

The first time I remember hearing about Robin the person, rather than Robin the authoritative and extraordinarily well-cited academic, was when he was still living in Sweden and my then PhD supervisor described him as the ‘wise brown owl’ of the alcohol and drug field. The image has stuck in my mind over the subsequent years that I’ve worked with Robin at Turning Point and the University of Melbourne.

It is apparent to anyone that Robin is an extraordinary scholar. We all know that he is in demand internationally for his expertise in alcohol and other drugs policy. He is widely admired by academics for his incisive ability to see to the heart of the issue at hand and his unusual capacity to work across disciplines.

What people who haven’t worked with Robin might not know is that he is also incredibly generous and warm hearted. I have enormously valued his guidance and friendship as my supervisor for the past three years. When I ask Robin to read a draft of a paper I invariably receive a prompt, extensive and very thoughtful response. Many a time I’ve asked a quick question only to find shortly after a full page in my inbox of thoughts from Robin on the issue, with pdf attachments spanning the years and countries of his experience.

Although Robin is frequently called to meet with senior government figures in Australia and elsewhere, no small local meeting is ever too unimportant for him to attend. Robin cheers on and supports the staff, he works with us on our endeavours great and small, and when grants or articles aren’t successful he is quick to offer kind words that encourage us not to give up. But really, what I have loved most about working with Robin is his boundless and contagious enthusiasm for the work that we all do to reduce alcohol and other drug-related problems.
My first encounter with Robin Room was anonymous. The year was 1989 and I had submitted my first article—an ethnographic analysis of drinking practices among members of the skinhead subculture in Perth, Western Australia—to the *British Journal of Addiction*. The reviews arrived (hard copies by airmail!) and I read them eagerly before showing them to David Hawks, the director of what was then the National Centre for Research into the Prevention of Drug Abuse (now the National Drug Research Institute). Judging by the general tone, style and typeface, David was certain that one of the reviewers was Robin (a fact confirmed by Robin many years later). I was thrilled to think that someone as prominent in the field as Robin had read my work. As a junior scholar new to alcohol and other drug research, I had spent a lot of time reading my way into the area prior to initiating new research. Time and again, I had come across excellent pieces by Robin. In a field dominated by epidemiological, psychological and biomedical research, it was refreshing to read such interesting and engaging sociological work by a well-known and respected figure. More than this, it made me feel that I wasn’t alone.

I came across Robin’s review again six months ago when moving offices. The slightly raised impression of the typeface can still be felt on the original, yellowing hard copy. What strikes me most about the review after all these years, and having since come to know Robin, is how clearly it demonstrates many of his academic and personal qualities: the encyclopedic knowledge of extremely diverse but relevant material; the insightful suggestions regarding subtle changes in the article’s analytical emphasis; the encouraging and constructively critical tone; and the collegiality, generosity and humility in taking the time to provide such a detailed response to the work of a junior scholar. And all of this advice was provided not to raise barriers to publication (which is how it sometimes feels in these days of journal rejection rates and impact factors) but to collaborate to produce the best analysis possible. It would be too much to say that I’m still working in alcohol and other drug research because of Robin, but he was certainly a huge source of intellectual inspiration to a young scholar struggling to find his (research) feet.
I first met Robin at a Kettil Bruun Society thematic meeting on ‘Alcohol, Family and Significant Others’ at Vuoranta in Helsinki in 1991. Or actually, I had seen him a few years earlier when he was a visiting fellow at the Alcohol Research Institute in Helsinki. He was having lunch with Klaus Mäkelä at a restaurant in Kalevankatu. A colleague at the Nordic Council of Alcohol and Drug Research told me that this was the famous Robin Room, who Kettil Bruun always talked so warmly about. We did not have the courage to say hello to him, though, and Klaus did not see us sneaking around in Kalevankatu.

Back to the KBS thematic meeting: Pia Rosenqvist, who was one of the organisers of the meeting, had asked me to be discussant for a paper presented by Robin and some of his co-workers. I don’t remember what the paper was about; I only remember that I was rather critical—and very nervous. Could I really allow myself to criticise a paper written by Robin Room, the hotshot of international alcohol research? I asked Pia before the session and she said, laughing, ‘Sure, let him have it, he will love it’. So I criticised the paper, and Robin did not brush aside my objections but threw himself into an enthusiastic discussion of the paper’s strengths and weaknesses. I remember thinking that this was an ideal way of responding to critique from a discussant at a conference.

Over the years I have come to know Robin as a brilliant researcher and a fascinating lecturer and discussant at conferences. I have always been impressed by his intelligence, his knowledge of all there is to know in the alcohol and drug field, and his immense creativity when it comes to pointing at new scientific directions and perspectives. Also, Robin is a very generous person, willing to share his knowledge and ideas with colleagues and welcoming guests visiting him in Stockholm or Melbourne at his workplace, as well as in his home with Gretchen.

In 2007 Robin and I edited a book together: *Youth Drinking Cultures: European Experiences*. What a pleasure it was to work with somebody who knows so much about alcohol and drug research and who is such a skilled writer and editor!

The remarkable thing about Robin is that despite his hotshot status, he is humble. A few weeks ago SFI, the Danish National Centre for Social Research, where I work part time, invited him to a conference for practitioners and policy makers in Copenhagen. The communications department at SFI worried that a world famous scholar like Robin wouldn’t be interested in coming to this Danish conference. Robin, however, sent a very friendly note saying that he was honoured and with pleasure accepted the invitation. As always, I am impressed by his willingness to share his knowledge with others, and to travel around the world in order to do so.
I Walk the Line (1970)

Gregory, Peck, Tuesday Weld, Estelle Parsons

Peck as a Tennessee small-county sheriff, contemporary time. Moonshining is endemic, more or less tolerated by local lawmen, but feds (dressed in suits) come in to chase down the local stills. Peck has fallen in love with daughter of a local hereditary moonshiner, she in the end won't go with him, sheriff ends up covering up for a murder by the family. Moonshining presents as an understandable way of making Ends meet, hereditary, a bit backward—moonshiners drive 1940s pickup truck. Federal revenuers present pretty unapatheticlly very little drinking shown, though a couple of occasions when people could be seen as being drunk.
KBS conference dinner national sing-along with the Swedish contingent, Riverside, 2005
Treatment Systems Studies

Including the Community Epidemiology Lab Work at ARG and the AA Study

Robin: ‘The Alcohol Research Group had begun with studying drinking in the general population, but by the mid-1970s we had become interested also in societal responses to drinking problems, whether by the police, by welfare systems or in alcohol treatment and other health systems. We quickly learned that alcohol problems looked different through the window of a treatment agency from how they looked in the general population. I wrote about this in my 1977 paper about “the two worlds of alcohol problems”.

‘Ron Roizen, Connie Weisner, Laura Schmidt and I looked at alcohol treatment and services as a system, asking how the different parts of the treatment system related both to heavy drinking in the general population and to the drinking problems of health and social services clients. Besides looking at alcohol and drug treatment services, we also looked at how alcohol problems showed up in emergency rooms, jails and courts, nutritionists’ offices and all sorts of other places. We found many people involved in alcohol treatment that had not previously been included in alcohol studies. We also developed a clear picture of how economic position made a big difference in the type and amount of treatment people receive.

‘Jessica Storbjörk, Jessica Palm, Jenny Cisneros and Kerstin Stenius did a study in Stockholm, Sweden, that built on the Alcohol Research Group study findings. Since then, the subfield of treatment systems research (as contrasted with research that evaluates treatment outcomes) has spread widely. These studies are changing our perceptions about how people become defined as having alcohol problems and how they actually end up in different kinds of treatment.

‘We became interested also in the history of alcohol and drug treatment. Jim Baumohl and I worked on this quite early, and it’s still an interest of mine, so I have enjoyed advising Caro Clark on her current dissertation on the history of alcohol treatment institutions in Victoria.

‘Another look at treatment was the International Collaborative Study of Alcoholics Anonymous, led by Klaus Mäkelä from 1992 to 1998. We always called it ‘the AA Study’. It looked across cultures to see what remained the same and what changed in a grassroots organisation as it developed in different cultures. In the latter half of the 1990s Klaus and I both wrote papers summarising the AA Study, mine entitled “AA as a Social Movement”.'
I spent a lovely Saturday going through old papers from my time working with Robin at the Alcohol Research Group, and it brought back wonderful memories! So writing this has probably been more of a gift to me than to Robin. How I wish I could be in Melbourne to join you for the Festschrift—please know that I will be thinking of you!

Robin has been a unique kind of mentor who helped me grow both the scholarly and career side of work. A couple of scholarly matters that played developmental roles in my thinking were Robin’s understanding of ‘theory’ (I’m sure everyone remembers the debates among Robin, Ron and others about the place of theory). This helped me appreciate conceptual approaches and has been critical in balancing both answering pragmatic questions and keeping a focus on more overarching, long-lasting questions, as health services research has become important in alcohol and drug research. Second were the long debates with Robin, Ron, Jim and Larry about advocacy versus non-advocacy roles in our research. Again, Robin identified a middle ground that very much influenced my thinking.

Robin encouraged, even facilitated, me in developing my own research niche. The work at ARG in the later 1980s and early 1990s focused solely on the general population. Even while I was a research assistant, Robin got me involved with the 1979 WHO Community Response study and let me play a role in developing its treatment piece. Most importantly, his paper on ‘the two worlds of alcohol problems’ (which I consider one of the greatest, foreshadowing health services papers in our field) and ‘treatment seeking and other realities’ stimulated my entire career trajectory! He listened to my talking about and edited my writing on my social work experiences. He helped me adapt many of the general population concepts to the treatment world, helping me focus on the social ecology of treatment. This has sustained my whole career. He fostered an intellectual environment that few universities have.

Robin is someone whose intellect and vision I so admire; he is someone I respect highly. I am not sure that I would have gone back to school if he had not pushed me. He is the best of all mentors (except the workaholic part).
Dear Robin,

This letter is not about your extraordinary contribution to alcohol and drug research. Neither is it about how warm-hearted you are, how genuinely concerned you are about the well-being of others, or about how generous you are when it comes to sharing your knowledge and contributing to the work of others without asking for much in return.

Instead, I would like to highlight your way of enjoying life and parties. I remember nights at numerous conferences when you stayed up partying. Often you were the last man standing. While others might have started to look tired and ‘down at heel’ as the conference progressed, you would be annoyingly fresh while presenting your thoughts early in the morning.

I specifically wish to share my memory of an evening at the Kettil Bruun Society conference in California in 2005. My impression is that you like to hang out with the ‘younger generation’. I remember several times when you chose to have dinner with us—first, you had to go and cancel dinner with those leading researchers who had already asked you to join them. There was a party that night in California. I think you had gone out with the well reputed. We, the younger generation, came back to the hotel after midnight. The bar was closed, but I think we found something to drink and hung out in the reception area. We started to miss your company, so we asked around and were told that you and two of your colleagues had had some late drinks in your room ... and fallen asleep. We knew you liked to party and, we were confident enough that you would not mind our disturbing you, so we rang your room and woke you up around 1am. Of course you were not angry with us. Instead, you got dressed, came down to the reception, joined the party, and sang ‘Waltzing Matilda’ one more time. Again, and again.

Thank you for all the good memories and more memories to come.

Jessica
false morels look like
old ears remind Robin
that trees don’t listen

Robin seems to be at ease anywhere, with modesty sharing his superior knowledge.

One spring we took him to a small Finnish forest to pick false morels. We picked.
Robin talked. About church history, welfare systems, anthropological studies of intoxication.

This is the only time I have thought that Robin would possibly have preferred to be elsewhere.

However, it was a very productive walk. We all enjoyed the dinner, comparing one stew with fresh false morels and one with dried ones, from the previous year. The latter mushrooms were better. Three times boiled in new water. Talking about church history, welfare systems, anthropological studies of intoxication.
Maria Elena Medina-Mora

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

Taken from Maria Elena Medina-Mora’s ‘Chapter 4: Comorbidity: Depression and Substance Abuse’ in Depression in Latinos, edited by S. A. Aguilar-Gaxiola and T. P. Gullotta (2008)

I was finishing a degree in psychology and uncertain as to the area in which to specialize when an instructor encouraged me to intern at the Mexican Center of Studies in Drug Dependence. This newly created centre was responsible for developing programs which would address increased drug use in Mexico and develop policy recommendations. This experience enabled me to work on the frontier of science between drug policy and drug treatment.

Over time, the centre was incorporated into the Mexican National Institute of Psychiatry and became a collaborating centre of the World Health Centre. This led to my working with the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto and the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley, in particular with Robin Room, with whom I have kept a fruitful and ongoing collaboration. With Robin’s encouragement, I embraced a social epidemiological approach. Presently (2008) I am interested in studying drug behaviour from a systems perspective where drugs, persons and environmental context interact, and in understanding how culture defines and gives meaning to the subject matter.
Lynda Berends
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

*Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.* (John Lennon)

Robin has offered this precious quote to me a couple of times during heartfelt conversations about career pathways and forks in the road. It’s a timely reminder (that I have since used myself) to enjoy life’s journey and avoid the angst.

Thank you, Robin, for your oh so wise counsel, your humour and your company. You enrich the world and inspire us all to be active and constructive in our efforts to make it a better place.

Lee Kaskutas
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

Robin was my dissertation chair and mentor in graduate school. The most important thing I would put in this Book of Letters is to say that he helped me more than is imaginable.
Robin singing with his Press Röster choir at the celebration before he left for Australia in 2006
A Glossary of Robinisms

1. ‘Barefoot and pregnant’
   a) Woman bearing child while lacking shoes.
   b) Person living constantly on the edge of oblivion yet somehow still managing to procreate freely
   c) Chronic condition afflicting grant-funded researchers

2. ‘Crashing down another open door’
   a) Statement that verifies the obvious
   b) Publishable research findings

3. ‘FSM’
   a) Free Speech Movement (c’mon, were you not at Berkeley in 1964?)

4. ‘Governing images’
   a) Stuff we all think to be true
   b) Stuff we all think to be true that is only a worry for sociologists

5. ‘Instapaper’
   a) Draft manuscript that is written before the data have been collected, double entered, coded and analysed
   b) Paper in which all conclusions have been drawn prior to the analysis of any actual data
   c) Brilliant, publishable manuscript that blooms by simply adding water

6. ‘Intimate domination’
   a) Misogynistic exploitation of women who are intoxicated
   b) Having fun with a guy wearing beer goggles

7. ‘Journeyman’ (alt. ‘Journeywoman’)
   a) Flexible, skilled worker
   b) Academic slave-labourer paid very little for producing publishable manuscripts on any and all variety of topics
   c) Highly successful NIH-funded researcher
8. ‘Long shaggy-dog tale’
   a) Lengthy story told many times
   b) Story that starts with an RA job in 1968

9. ‘Long waves’
   (You tell me. I know it’s super smart, but I could never really wrap my head around it.)

10. ‘Looks good’
    a) Modest, kind-hearted statement reflecting the fact that this draft needs considerable work
    b) Draft is OK but requires numerous, significant modifications
    c) Draft, while being a strong attempt, has substantially missed the mark and, frankly, ‘I’m just biding my time until you get a clue’

11. ‘Looks very good’
    a) Modest statement reflecting the fact that this manuscript is truly brilliant and should be published in a top-tier journal
    b) ‘You, my dear, have seriously hit the jackpot’

12. ‘Spare people’
    a) Human beings unfairly marginalised by the modern capitalist social order
    b) Sociologists

13. ‘Two worlds’
    a) Complex distinction between the worlds of clinically treated populations and regular people living in the general population
    b) Disparate traditions of substance abuse research that fail to communicate well with one another
    c) An altered state of consciousness achieved only by grant writing for several weeks on end without sleep

14. ‘Workhorse paper’
    a) First manuscript summarising the major findings of a new study
    b) Manuscript so large and unwieldy as to require a very strong horse to drag it forward
    c) Dissertation in sociology
Robin straddling the Equator in 2013
Working with WHO

Robin: ‘The many layers and ongoing incarnations of alcohol’s place in the global burden of diseases, as well as its harm to others, name and explore a truth that we were all aware of but which had not been pinned down in quantitative terms—that alcohol-caused and alcohol-related harm is far more important than most other health risk factors. How to measure the risk factors, costs and suggested guidelines around these burdens and harms is currently in hot debate. It is crucial that we make the measures and methods transparent and clearly understandable.

‘I’ve worked with the World Health Organization on alcohol issues (and occasionally on drug issues) since the mid-1970s. A constant theme for WHO has been the need to draw attention to the very serious problems with alcohol in most parts of the world, which have been underplayed for decades partly because of the reaction against temperance, partly because of the interests of the alcohol industries and partly because the good and the great mostly enjoy their drinking. There have been a number of projects I have worked on about documenting the extent and diversity of alcohol problems, but probably the most important have been the studies since the 1990s of how much of the global burden of death and disability is attributable to alcohol, and other studies since 1998 of the harms from drinking to others around the drinker. This work derives from the assumption that alcohol and drug use cannot be understood by looking only at individual motivation or cell biology. It must also consider social group norms and customs and patterns of behaviour. Understanding harm to others depends on the fact that the consequences of alcohol and drug use are interactive and social.’
Tribute to Robin Room

I met you one trip to Geneva at tea,
My mentor, Lee Robins, introduced you to me,
Robin the man in the room with a smile,
Who would do anything for you, save walk for a mile.
When people dissented, you felt really bad,
'Cause you wanted the team to be happy, not sad,
You laughed and you cried, told the truth, never lied.
Your ideas were solid, your writing real clear,
At meetings you listened, were positive for the team,
So we could think better, and never lose steam.
A most generous man you have been for the field,
Robin Room, congratulations; your legacy is sealed.

Linda B. Cottler
I know that many will refer to the period of Robin’s collaboration with the World Health Organization in Geneva—one of the many areas of his excellent work—and so I shall restrict myself to expressing once more thanks for the remarkable contributions that he made to the WHO program in the field of abuse of alcohol and drugs. I also wish to thank the organisers for bringing together the many who have witnessed Robin’s work and admired his productivity, erudition and vision.

Dear Robin,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you on behalf of the entire Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the World Health Organisation in Geneva on the occasion of the celebration of your long-standing and extraordinary work in alcohol and drug research to be held in Melbourne, Australia, on 13th September, 2014.

Your achievements in the field have been astonishing, and we have been most fortunate to be able to take advantage of your knowledge and wisdom for more than forty years. As the longest serving member of the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Drug Dependence and Alcohol Problems, and a member of both the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence and the WHO Expert Committee on Problems Related to Alcohol Consumption, you have been a valuable consultant and adviser on many occasions.

The list of your significant and often key contributions to WHO projects and publications is almost too long to mention. I would like, however, to highlight your involvement in the alcohol and injuries study; the revisions of ICD-10 and 11; the ground-breaking work on alcohol in developing societies; and the current harm to others research project as a few examples of your exemplary work with us.

Many institutions around the world have had the privilege of including you among their staff and you have always kept your strong commitment to the public health
aspects of substance use, and more specifically, your commitment to contribute to the work of WHO.

Your ability to reconcile apparently contradictory views and opinions and still build a consensus on the way forward, as well as your engagement and young mind have been very helpful in several WHO meetings. The support you provided in building the evidence base for Member States as they deliberated upon the draft WHO global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol was crucial.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge your humble personality and encyclopedic knowledge, including the history of almost all key questions in the area of substance abuse and related policies, which has made you an indispensable resource for our department and a dear friend to many of us. We hope to continue to avail ourselves of your vast knowledge for years to come!

Yours sincerely,

Shekhar Saxena

Maristela Monteiro

WASHINGTON, D.C., USA

Dear Robin,

Many who now know you knew your work before they ever met you in person at a conference or on a collaborative project. I am one of them, and for years before I joined the World Health Organization, I admired you through your publications. The views in those publications, and the wit that came through as I read them, influenced my views about alcohol problems and challenged me to think outside the biomedical world to which I was dedicated.

Then came the moment to meet the real person, and I must confess that my anxiety was that of a fan meeting her idol. And later when we met through WHO meetings and projects, my awe at your vast knowledge never left me. It only grew to include your sense of humour and your awesome kindness and willingness to help move ideas forward. I, of course, continue to admire your work and expertise and know I can count on you any time I need to find the right reference! I know that whatever I ask I will get a thoughtful answer, supported by the key references, earlier studies and new perspectives that will help me move along.

Thank you, Robin, for all these years of assistance, support and contributions to an area of work that is as fascinating as you are to me. Working with your guidance
has always been a pleasure way beyond your scientific contributions to any particular project. Your humanity breathes through your thoughts and ideas, and this makes any project done with you a joy to pursue.

Maristela

Members of the WHO/Thai Health project who met in Melbourne in 2011
Robin Room and I have known each other for close to forty years and I suspect that we both hope our respective life’s work has done something to help improve the health and happiness of humankind. Although the current state of the alcohol policy debate would seem to consign us to opposing camps, we have worked in parallel far more often than we have worked in opposition.

It’s not just the curious coincidence that we both have first degrees in English literature, but also the happy conjugation of stars that first brought us together. Our relationship began and was nurtured by three wise men—Archer Tongue, Griffith Edwards and Norman Sartorius. Where exactly did Robin and I first meet? I cannot say for sure, but I’m confident that it was under the benign influence of one or other of those three, quite possibly in one of their endlessly hospitable homes, probably over a glass or two of some excellent Burgundy.

When we first got to know each other, I was in charge of an NGO based at the Institute of Psychiatry in London and Robin was in charge of a research group linked to the School of Public Health in Berkeley. I’d persuaded my employers to give me a few months of sabbatical leave and I’m pretty sure it was Griffith who talked me into spending it with Robin’s group in Berkeley, where I intended to conduct an international review of alcohol education.

Goodness knows what Robin thought of the series of unreasonable demands I made of him prior to my arrival, including that he arrange weekly cello lessons for my ten-year-old daughter! In fact, I have some inkling of what he thought, since he simply passed my requests on to Larry Wallack, who thought it best to ignore them until my arrival. Larry and I have remained improbable friends ever since. As for Robin, he never mentioned the cello lessons and neither did I. Anyway, in and out of the Alcohol Research Group there were a lot more interesting things to do than play the cello. Robin was at his best at the centre of a community of scholars.

At that time I was responsible for the News and Notes section of the *British Journal of Addiction* (now *Addiction*) and wrote in the December 1981 issue about my experience in Berkeley:

Now, sitting here at a desk which overlooks San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge, I am conscious of wishing to repay a debt of gratitude to an institute and its director, who have given me physical and intellectual space for two summers … In a world where research workers are jealous of every little shred of an idea they happen to have pared off for themselves, it is, I think, a privilege to have worked, even for two summers, in an institute where
people are as generous of their ideas and of their time as they are at the ARG. Instead of hastily covering up half-written papers lest you catch a glimpse of their precious little gems, they are prepared to knock their ideas around the office like rubber balls. Some of them fly out the window into the Bay, but most of them get caught by somebody. That is why ARG works so well—the sense of productivity, the sense of informality and the sense that ideas are free for all.

Over a score of years Robin and I came into frequent contact at meetings of the International Council of Alcohol and Addictions and at the World Health Organization, where I was the staff member responsible for global alcohol activities from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. It was during this time that Robin moved from research eminence in Berkeley to Toronto, and then in the late 1990s to Stockholm.

Often in Geneva, but also in cities across the globe, Robin and I would find ourselves in meetings that had been set up by Archer Tongue (ICAA) or Norman Sartorius (WHO) where the enthusiasm we both felt for what was being discussed far outweighed any differences of opinion we might have about the nature of alcohol problems or how best to address them. And there were more of those lively, challenging and convivial dinners at Archer’s villa in Lausanne, Norman’s apartment in Geneva and Griffith’s house in Greenwich, where Robin and I strove to keep up with the erudition and expansiveness of our hosts.

Of course life moves on and our parallel tracks have diverged somewhat in recent years, perhaps in part because I chose to resign from WHO to set up an alcohol policy think tank—the International Center for Alcohol Policies—largely funded by major drinks companies. But I prefer to think that it has been more the conflictual times in which we live that have magnified our apparent differences of opinion rather than any fundamental philosophical or moral opposition to each other’s points of view. In that same piece in the British Journal of Addiction I called Robin a ‘latter-day Hegelian’; I’m not really sure any more exactly what I meant by that, but you can be confident that it was intended as a compliment.

Put at its simplest, Robin is a great scholar and I am not; although I’d like to think that I am perhaps the more skilled politician. In other words, our skills are complementary and for twenty years or more the world allowed us to operate on that basis. Then things got trickier, we grew older and many of those who worked alongside us on alcohol policy issues became less tolerant of inclusiveness. The sad decline of ICAA and the budgetary woes of WHO are signs of these changes, of that loss of tolerance.

When I was a student, my tutor on eighteenth-century literature told me: ‘We must learn to tolerate everything except intolerance’. I’d like to think Robin would agree with that. I know our three wise men would.
Dear Robin,

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for all the years you've shared your experiences and wisdom with me. I am looking forward to more years to come. Without any overstatement, you have been the most instrumental in helping us all achieve some of the important breakthroughs in alcohol research and policy over the past decades.

I am supposed to write something funny or telling, so I am turning to a different story, one involving one of your vices, as I am sure your virtues will be well talked about by others.

We were in a small meeting of a World Health Organization project in Phoenix and decided to take a plane ride over the Grand Canyon to explore the spectacular views during some free time. We were thinking of taking three or four of us, but the pilot looked at us in a way that indicated we might be too heavy for the small plane, and asked us for our exact body weights. We gave our weights but then we were led to a set of scales, and these indicated that our self-reporting had not been the best of measures. The estimates of the first three people (which included Robin and me) were off by nearly ten kilos each. We ended up starting the flight with three on board but had to turn back because of bad weather.

This was just another indication that self-reporting in surveys and elsewhere should not be trusted.

Best,

Jürgen

It has been a great pleasure to bring Sri Lanka into, and participate personally in, our WHO/Thai Health Alcohol’s Harm to Others project, which grew out of Anne-Marie Laslett and Robin’s national (Australian) project. Of course I would very much have
enjoyed being part of the celebration in Melbourne in September, but I have just returned to Colombo after spending three months there. Robin, I am sending you best wishes from here at home for your special celebration of fifty years of committed and many-sided work.

Petra Meier

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SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND

I’m not a creative writer, and definitely can’t do poems or limericks in a foreign language, so my contribution is just to say a huge ‘Thank You!’ Let me explain …

My foray into the alcohol world started with taking up a lectureship at the University of Sheffield. Not that anyone there was doing alcohol research at the time, but I was suddenly in a very research-active environment, and there was an expectation that we would identify a niche and quickly bring in grants. My previous research had focused on illicit drug use, but it seemed there were far more opportunities in alcohol research.

My new department was full of systematic reviewers and health economists, so we tried our luck and got funding for a project reviewing and modelling alcohol pricing and promotion policies.

Having literally no clue whatsoever about alcohol policy in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, I remember how a colleague and I, desperate for some expert input, trawled the web and kept finding the names ‘Robin Room’ and ‘Tim Stockwell’. We fired off a couple of emails and a day later both Robin and Tim had agreed to help, sent copious amounts of relevant reading material, and invited me to come to the next Kettil Bruun Society conference due to start a few weeks later. Once there, Robin and Tim made a real effort to introduce me to all the lovely folk in the field, and with it being such a friendly and supportive scientific community I decided to make it my ‘home’ and build up alcohol research at Sheffield.

Many conferences followed (I can almost sing ‘Waltzing Matilda’ now!) and a few years back I spent a lively month swapping my Sheffield desk for a Melbourne-based one. Robin is so enthusiastic about most things that I’m still waiting for him to say ‘no’ to a steering group invitation, request to review something at short notice or a quick mayday call saying, ‘Robin, please, could you help us with …?’

It is truly inspiring to work with people like that, so I just want to say a heartfelt … Thank you, Robin, you are a great guy!
Dear Robin,

I wish I could be at your Festschrift. I’m sure there will be much fun, erudite discussion and maybe even one or two impromptu performances of ‘Waltzing Matilda’.

Like so many others, I owe you a huge debt of gratitude and want to thank you for always being generous with your time, with your words of encouragement, with your sharing of your famously encyclopedic knowledge and your most entertaining stories. Equally, I want to thank you for helping to create a field, a kind of enchanted space into which I, like many, have been lucky enough to enter and spend much of my professional life. As I look back, whenever I have produced what I thought was half-decent work, you were one of the first people I hoped would see it and, of course, I hoped you would approve. I know sometimes that was not the case, but that has also been half the fun!

I remember first hearing you speak at a meeting in London at the Institute of Psychiatry, I think around 1981. Ian Robertson, then from Scotland, had been speaking about controlled drinking and holding forth passionately about the importance of understanding alcohol use within a broad social context. We clinicians needed to hear such a message very badly. You held the attention of every single person in the room and, as ever, added a fresh and eloquently expressed perspective.

I remember visiting you at both the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley and at the Centre for Social Research in Alcohol and Drugs in Stockholm. You were always so welcoming and hospitable. You were good enough to attend several meetings we held in Perth at the National Drug Research Institute. Some of the meetings you hosted at ARF in the 1990s and later near Stockholm were some of the most inspiring and rewarding I have attended. You have always been able to draw people in, to seek out scholars from different disciplines and, especially, younger researchers whom you have encouraged and who have then learned from you.

I have so many other memories. Singing a certain Australian ballad with you after the Kettil Bruun Society conference dinner in Reykjavik—glorious sunshine outside at 11pm. A wonderful dinner at your and Gretchen’s apartment in Stockholm attended by guests from I think seven different countries! Several sidebar lessons in Swedish and Finnish history, which I probably have still not got quite straight. And there was our collaboration on the editorial for the special issue of the Drug and Alcohol Review on drinking guidelines. Even at the outset we agreed on virtually everything—including
that it would probably be impossible for us to both sign off on the same editorial because our views were so divergent. But we worked it out and I’m very proud to have co-authored it with you.

So please accept my salutations on this special occasion and my appreciation for the many gifts you have given to us all who toil in the field of alcohol studies. I look forward to what I hope will be many more opportunities for debate, singing and even lessons in Finnish history.

Congratulations and very best wishes to you and Gretchen for future health and happiness.

Researchers who came to Melbourne to share their Harm to Others projects gathered in a laneway near Turning Point, 2011
Having a daily lunch special (which included low-alcohol beer) near the SoRAD offices in Stockholm
Drug Studies

Robin: ‘I was first pulled into drug studies in 1974 by Jerry Jaffe, Nixon’s “drug czar”. But after a few years I found it was very difficult to tell the truth if you hoped to get further funding. No matter what your findings, you had to follow the US drug policy line. Not only were you inevitably compromised, you could drown in the ideology. So I retreated back into alcohol studies where no one—in those days, not even the alcohol industry—objected to what we were saying about alcohol.

‘I moved to Canada in 1991 and tried again, at the World Health Organization’s request, with a study comparing the different problems caused by different drugs. It included alcohol and tobacco as well as illegal drugs. The results—which showed there was far more harm from alcohol than from illegal drugs—caused shock waves. Although pharmacologically alcohol certainly belongs in any list of harmful substances, no one in the political system, and certainly not in the alcohol industry, wanted to face that. Our more recent work on alcohol’s harm to others continues this theme of providing evidence of the actual harm of alcohol use and abuse. If you’re going to do drug studies, you need a strategy for handling the controversy as well as the disbelief that is sometimes caused by the findings.

‘I’ve looked at drugs across categories of legal and illegal, and asked what the up to now quite separate worlds of drugs, tobacco, alcohol and gambling research can teach each other. (Thanks to Laura Schmidt’s work on sugar’s addictive properties, it is becoming clear that sugar should be included on this list.) It will be very interesting to watch the development of legal cannabis regimes in the United States and Uruguay. Will they replicate the history and patterns of alcohol and tobacco control systems? In 1999, I moved to Sweden, where Catherine Carstairs (a Canadian temporarily working with us there) and I studied the international drug conventions, including the place of alcohol and tobacco and sports supplements versus drugs in international treaty provisions as well as issues involved in legalising less harmful drugs. I have become notorious for a YouTube clip where I said in essence that if our aim is to have less harm, it would be better for young people to use marijuana instead of alcohol.’
Another Way of Thinking About It

I think the most striking characteristic of Robin’s is the way in which he can propose alternative ways of thinking about alcohol or drugs. It seems that whatever the proposition, research question, analysis or conclusion, he has the knack of getting to the heart of one’s implied assumptions, underlying worldview or disciplinary bias. This then opens up a new way of thinking about the research piece, the problem or the analysis. This extraordinary ability to provide a different way of thinking has meant that scholars around the world have benefited and advanced ideas that would otherwise have remained elusive.

I think there are three reasons why Robin is extraordinarily good at this. First, he is gentle. He can express his view in such a way that one does not become defensive or feel criticised. Second, and likely linked to the gentleness, is that he has an absence of ego. It is not about him but about the idea. Third, he has such a depth of knowledge across disciplinary perspectives that he can understand, interpret and re-analyse almost any aspect of alcohol and drugs. This is more than an abundance of knowledge; it is wisdom.

I know the above from the few pieces of work where we have intersected. Sadly, most of my work with Robin since his arrival back in Australia has not actually been scholarly. It has been about ‘service’; service to the profession and to the sector. On his return to Australia in 2006, showing no signs of stepping back, Robin has taken on three substantial roles—he has been the Editor in Chief of Drug and Alcohol Review, President of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia and a board member for the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs. I have shared with him the challenges and successes associated with each of these service roles. There is often little explicit return for such service—Robin does it because of his deep, abiding commitment to the field of alcohol and other drugs. For this, we are exceptionally grateful.
How can such a modest, unassuming and self-effacing scholar have such a stellar reputation? Robin is not just a towering figure in the Australian world of alcohol and drugs research, he also is well known and highly regarded in North America and Europe. I know that I am one of many in numerous countries to have been inspired by and learned greatly from his insightful and always learned papers.

Robin was one of the early sceptics about global drug prohibition, but he has always written about the international control system, as he writes about everything else, with a strong sense of fairness and balance. Readers of his papers on global drug prohibition would not be left in doubt about his views on the modesty of the evidence supporting supply control measures or the growing evidence of severe unintended negative consequences. But there are no ideological jibes or cheap shots at those who defend drug prohibition. The recent report (which later became a book) on global cannabis policy is a landmark in the field. Global opinion and even action is now starting to move in the direction foreshadowed in the 2010 book.

I have long admired Robin’s balanced approach to the biological, psychological and social antecedents and consequences of alcohol problems in an era when many leaders in the field could only take biological aspects seriously and some even asserted that alcohol and drug problems were in reality nothing more than a ‘chronic relapsing brain disease’.

Robin’s encyclopedic knowledge of the alcohol and drug field is truly astonishing. He seems to have read everything and forgotten nothing he has ever read. I remember making a few comments on a paper he wrote about alcohol in Australia while he was living abroad. It turned out Robin knew more about the situation in Australia than I did while living here.

Robin has never lost his passion to think of new angles for research or thinking that might help communities to harness the copious existing knowledge and evidence they have to reduce the health, social and economic cost of psychoactive substances. As a clinician, it is easy for me and quite logical to turn to research as another tool for reducing the vast misery that alcohol and drugs wreak on so many communities. I have always been mystified how Robin, from a non-clinical background, musters the enormous passion he has for his research and intellectual curiosity.

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to gratefully thank Robin for his stimulating work, admire his personal values and wish him well for the future. We are all greatly in his debt.
Pia Rosenqvist

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Mobile Robin, Automobile, *Perpetuum Mobile*

We all know what an automobile is, but we seldom associate it with you, Robin. (Though, see the photo below.)

But *perpetuum mobile*, does that have anything to do with you? Oh yes! *Perpetuum mobile* is music characterised by a continuous steady stream of notes, usually at a rapid tempo! That is you!

It also refers to a condition in which work is continuously done without an external supply of energy, or with an unending external supply of energy (like the sun). That is you!

Thanks for creating for us all a mobile and warm, mental and physical home on (so far) three continents and wrapping them in a sense of us all belonging together!
In 1996 I was a new graduate student working towards my first publication, on the discourses of illegal drug use in Canada. I was asked to give a paper at the Addiction Research Foundation (now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) in Toronto. I was very nervous, not only because I was a beginner at this sort of thing, but also because I feared that addiction specialists would accuse me of not taking drug use very seriously. Throughout the presentation my confidence was bolstered by a large man in the front, who grinned and nodded at just the right places throughout my presentation. Afterwards I learned that this was Robin Room, one of the world’s foremost experts in addiction! He took my paper seriously, made some terrific recommendations and provided me with a long reading list. I was delighted.

I soon asked him to join my PhD committee, but shortly thereafter he left Toronto to head the Centre for Social Research in Alcohol and Drugs in Sweden. Even so, we kept in touch, and as I was finishing my PhD, he approached me to see if I would be interested in coming to SoRAD on a postdoctoral fellowship. Again, I was thrilled. It’s not too often that Canadian historians get to do international postdocs. I’d always been curious about Scandinavia and I was really excited about branching out into the interdisciplinary world of drug and alcohol studies.

As a postdoctoral mentor, Robin was generous, thoughtful and intellectually rigorous. Together we worked on international drug control issues. He also let me pursue my curiosity into doping in sport, which resulted in a paper that had a large impact on my subsequent research. At SoRAD a group of us often left the office for a hot lunch (a nice Swedish tradition). Robin would always somehow manage to bring a classic work in drug or alcohol studies into the conversation, regale us with amusing tales of various past research projects and inform us about current policy developments around the world. It was an amazing learning experience. Another great pleasure was hearing Robin singing in the hallways of SoRAD in the early evenings after most of the researchers had left for home. Robin’s many talents are not just in the academic and administrative world!

Since my year at SoRAD, I’ve morphed into a historian of health and medicine. I’m still interested in the history of alcohol and drugs (indeed, I have a PhD student who is about to defend her dissertation on alcohol advertising in North America), but my own work has extended into a diverse array of topics including food and nutrition, disability studies, public health and dentistry. I always feel a little guilty explaining to Robin that I’ve largely left drugs and alcohol behind, but Robin would be the first to understand that our intellectual curiosity sometimes takes us to unexpected places.
I’ve always thought of Robin as the ideal scholar: he is thoroughly engaged with the world of policy as well as the world of academe; he is intellectually playful, but his work is rigorous as well as abundant; and he brings people together in a spirit of generosity and common cause. I feel extremely fortunate to have worked with him, and hope to emulate him in modest ways as I move through my own career.

Benedikt Fischer

VANCOUVER, CANADA

I first met Robin some twenty years ago. I was a visiting graduate student at what was then the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto, where I’d been asked to attend a brainstorming meeting by research staff on a criminal justice matter. When the person with the legendary name was pointed out in the room, I first thought there was some misunderstanding, since it was not the first time I had encountered this individual. In fact, I had seen and noticed the man several times before, mostly in the mornings, on my way to the office, when I saw him walking down Spadina Avenue with rather wet and somewhat untamed hair, holding that day’s *New York Times* in one hand and a muffin in the other. I thought this man at best to be some later-age, slightly unkempt, beatnik-hipster-artist on his way to an early morning gig. Little did I know at these first sightings that I had been passing the ARF’s Vice-President of Research, and one of the world’s leading alcohol researchers, on his way to an undoubtedly long and productive work day.

As a bit of time passed, we ended up collaborating on some unexpected fronts. Robin early on took notice of my academic home at the University of Toronto’s critical school of criminology, which I think reminded him of his roots in paradigm-breaking sociology at Berkeley, forming a feeling of kindred spirits between us. The other fuel to our collaboration was that my keen interest in almost any aspect of addiction research was fresh (while certainly naive then). I was awake and ready to go to work, so a few unexpected opportunities for joint work with Robin (and others) were thrown my way. And so, suddenly, we were jointly worked on papers—me, naturally, as the very junior student partner—on constitutional issues regarding sexual assault while intoxicated, World Health Organization ‘Health for All’ goals, and cannabis policy options. I certainly had never imagined this happening. Soon added to these collaborative ventures was another ‘transcontinental import’ to ARF, Jürgen Rehm, initially hired by Robin as director of ARF’s social research department (but soon to expand his reign). The three of us started working together on several projects—which
helped me pay the bills during my PhD studies—many times meeting on weekends or after work, and joking about ourselves as the three ‘aliens’ (none of us then held Canadian passports) ‘infiltrating’ Canadian policy matters with our ‘foreign’ views.

Robin (together with others) became a most important and devoted supporter and mentor of my scientific work and career—first while I was still in training, continuing later as a junior scientist at ARF—providing good counsel, guidance and opportunities on innumerable fronts, with immeasurable significance and impact. I certainly have never met or worked with a more broadly knowledgeable, interested and wise scholar in the most classic of traditions: they seem to be close to extinct today. I have also rarely seen the scholarly industriousness and sharpness which Robin possesses, which became significant ideals for me. Yet added to all the scholarly benefits was also what became a friendship. I fondly recall many enjoyable dinners with Robin, Gretchen and others, whether at one of their homes, in Toronto, Stockholm or Melbourne, or at some remote conference-related venue. One endearing memory for me is Gretchen’s once sharing how she and Robin initially met and what charmed her about him: ‘He impressed me with his kindness’, she remarked. It reminded me of a meeting in Oslo, where a bunch of us were invited to Ingeborg Rossow’s house for drinks and supper. When the group of international visitors gathered for the trip to her house, Robin held a rather impressive—considering the geographic location, season and temperature—bunch of flowers in his hand. ‘We (meaning all of us) are bringing our hostess some flowers’, he remarked. Without any fuss he was of course the one who had mustered the practical thoughtfulness to organise the bouquet (and probably walked halfway across Oslo to find it).

I will also not forget how one morning, shortly after ARF had become one of several puzzle pieces creating the new juggernaut institution that would become the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, when the shocking news circulated that Robin had been terminated from his post of Vice-President of Research, and was required to leave the institution altogether. Many of us non-clinical scholars feared that this was the beginning of the end for social addiction research in Toronto in the tradition Robin had shaped and represented like no other. (Luckily, after some turbulent and uncertain times, the opposite turned out to be true, with the torch held and protected by others.) The transitions, however, meant that Robin was ‘lost’ to another continent, which for him, thankfully, meant that he landed on his feet, writing yet another distinct chapter in his illustrious and pioneering career.

Perhaps the most fun thing or project I ever undertook with Robin (along with two other pure-bred Aussies plus one hybrid Aussie-American, all convened by a true British Lady of noble standing), was the cannabis policy book. Over the years, I had often noted how Robin’s approach to the cannabis matter was probably quite a bit more ‘wet’ than on alcohol. The book was a most enjoyable and timely piece of work to which all involved brought their best assets with professional efficiency and an ease of collegiality and friendship. The hard work and the ease would have never
happened without Robin’s skilled leadership, determination and fearless initiative. He was willing to have another go at details everyone else was rather tired of as well as to deal with the most peripheral and boring of editorial or contractual details. I am often happy that my memories of this effort if not cast in stone are at least bound in paperback.

Yet enough with all the words! All these random tidbits of personal memories are simply meant to say in the most heartfelt and sincere way: many thanks, Robin, for all the exceptional mentorship, inspiration and friendship over the years. Have a happy and healthy seventy-fifth birthday! May there be many more good years to come!

Peter Reuter

COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND, USA

Robin Room and I only discovered each other late in our careers but have worked closely together on two multi-authored books and a Lancet article in the last five years. He is the most engaging of collaborators, endlessly patient about revisions and always prepared to throw his enormous erudition into the effort. Moreover, Robin is happy to pour out his expertise when asked. Looking at old emails I discovered a classic exchange in which Robin delivered two pages of lucid prose plus an earlier paper of his, in response to my simple inquiry about a methodology problem.

I’ve taken full advantage of the erudition often for illumination on obscure topics. Who would have thought that Robin had the history of pharmacy regulation in his memory bank? Surely the complete bibliography of everything ever written about alcohol would have taken up all the available memory? But there always seems room, to make a bad pun, in that capacious skull for yet more learning.

We have had fun writing together, with many lengthy Skype calls as well as the usual flood of emails. Robin will occasionally announce he is cross at someone but that never seems to translate into anything but the most courteous interactions. My advice to a young scholar in the alcohol field is to think of an interesting question and pose it to Robin; there is a good chance of a co-authored paper and an exciting collaboration.
I have many memories of Robin Room—as vice-president of research at the Addiction Research Foundation, now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; as board member of the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit; as colleague and co-author; as adviser and, together with Gretchen, as a friend.

In about 1980, when I visited the Alcohol Research Group in California, Robin hosted my visit and introduced me to Kaye Fillmore, who became a lifelong friend and confidante until her untimely death last year.

In the early 1990s, when the Ontario government established a new provincial tobacco strategy and I was asked to be director of the new research unit, I sought his counsel. He wisely replied, ‘You have to decide whether you want to be a researcher or a research manager’. That clarified everything for me.

In the mid-1990s, Robin was instrumental in identifying the need for a gathering of scientists to discuss alternative nicotine delivery systems. With his support and encouragement we held a major international conference on the topic and subsequently published *Nicotine and Public Health* with John Slade and Marilyn Pope, which was disseminated globally.

Robin also inspired. As a twentieth-century polymath, with hundreds of publications (and many more ideas) plus his collection of over 6000 books, he was knowledgeable in all areas of addiction and many other fields as well. He was a quick student and became something of an expert in the tobacco field, even though it was not his main focus of interest. As a sociologist he brought an important perspective to addictions science that complemented that of the many psychologists and medical researchers in the field.

Robin played a very important role in many of our lives and well deserves this wonderful tribute. Wishing you many more healthy and productive years!
Rumours of Room’s retirement must have been greatly exaggerated (apologies to Mark Twain). I would joke about the absurdity of a legendary workaholic like Robin ‘retiring’ except that I am sure many others have already made such jokes. Is someone who has been as prolific on so many fronts as Robin for so many years in so many places ever going to ‘retire’? Smart money is betting against it.

For example, most people I know who have edited a journal could hardly wait until their term of office was over. Who wouldn’t be eager to dispense with the constant deadlines, all that reading and hounding reviewers and so on. Robin, on the other hand, had no sooner handed off *Contemporary Drug Problems* (after twenty or so years) than he took on the editorship of another journal (and I think there are other journal editorial boards on which he sits). There are serial entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs and, as Robin’s history suggests, serial editors. In short, I am not buying any possibility of ‘retirement’ for a minute. If his long and distinguished career is any guide, Robin won’t stop working or even slow down; he’ll just move to a new country and keep churning out more great work.

My first significant encounter with Robin Room was in 1977, when I was a graduate student submitting my first professional paper for presentation at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Robin was then head of the Drinking and Drugs Division of SSSP (shocking, I know). Much to my delight, he and his reviewers accepted the paper, although he observed that my attempt to combine a history and an ethnography of cocaine use was ‘really two papers’. He made several good suggestions and noticed that I’d misspelled ‘entrepreneur’—not the last time I learned that no detail escapes his perspicacious eye.

In late 1982, our paths crossed again when I applied for a postdoctoral fellowship at the Alcohol Research Group. I wrote what I imagined was a clever proposal to investigate *l'affaire Sobell* as a case study in the politics of science: what institutions and individuals had done what sorts of ideological work to defend the disease concept of alcoholism against the heretical evidence that some people could learn to drink in a controlled fashion? I was invited to ARG’s Scenic Avenue building for a meeting. Robin said something like, ‘Well, we’d like to give you a postdoc, but we know already how the Sobell/disease concept story plays out. What we don’t know much about is this new group Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. You’ve taught a course in social movements; why don’t you study MADD and the anti-drunk driver movement instead?’ It was not the last time I would dig into some topic in the alcohol and drug field only to learn that Robin had already been there, done that.
Since my topic was not on he could have turned me away, but he took me in, and as a result, I got to know and to interact with the slew of great people in the field whom Robin somehow found the funding to collect around him at ARG: Connie Weisner, Denise Herd, Ron Roizen, Harry Levine, Jim Baumohl, Walt Clark, Andrea Mitchell and many more. To call Robin an institution builder is an understatement, for what he built and held together at ARG (and elsewhere since then) was a beehive of serious scholarly activity, a genuine intellectual community the likes of which I’ve never seen elsewhere. It was interdisciplinary before that became a deans’ buzzword—sociologists, historians, psychologists, anthropologists, public health scholars, policy wonks, ethnographers, statisticians and a cornucopia of others. There was the extraordinary seminar around the huge, beat-up oak conference table where everything could be said and everything could be challenged and yet everybody was still talking about the topic around the proverbial water cooler long after the seminar had ended. As a freshly minted PhD, I knew I liked working there. What I learned only with the passage of time was just how rare a feat it was to create and sustain such a community.

One of the ways Robin pulled all this off was involving other people in whatever he was doing. He roped me into being an associate editor of *Contemporary Drug Problems*, for example. I recall my amazement one day when I went into his office with a question about a paper submitted to *CDP*. It had gone out for multiple rounds of review and revision, but its whereabouts in the publication process were unknown. But only to me, as it turned out. Robin walked over to one of a dozen metre-high piles of paper behind which his desk was barricaded. He held it from falling with one hand while pulling the paper out from the middle of the stack with the other. He actually knew what was in each of those huge piles! Years later, when Robin invited me to give a talk at the social research centre in Stockholm, I couldn’t help but notice that his somewhat smaller office there, too, had the same, well, ‘design’. Even his stacks had stacks, some now in Swedish. Now that I’m on the brink of retirement, I must say I have followed Robin’s example in this way, too, except that, unlike him, I have scarcely a clue what is in all the stacks that line my office.

By any measure I can think of Robin Room as the most brilliant, accomplished alcohol and drug scholar in the world. He is also a terrific human being. I consider it one of the great strokes of good fortune in my career, as well as a privilege and a pleasure, to be among the many people who consider Robin a beloved mentor, friend and model of how to be an engaged intellectual. I wish him all the best for his ‘retirement’. 
Wayne Hall

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Robin’s intellectual contributions to alcohol and drug policy display a breadth of vision that includes a detailed appreciation of the global situation combined with a longer term historical view of policy developments over the past century; an aliveness to both cultural specificities and cross-cultural generalities in alcohol and drug regulation; and a comparative approach that seeks to learn from regulatory experiences with different types of psychoactive substances. His contributions reflect his long-standing interest in how governing ideas about alcohol and other drugs have influenced social responses to such drug use and the problems that their use can cause. He has an encyclopedic acquaintance with, and respect for, the contributions of scholars from a diverse range of scholarly disciplines, well outside his own areas of expertise. Colleagues remark upon his unerring ability to point them to some unknown piece of scholarship that is relevant to their work.

Among his personal characteristics are high standards of scholarship, intellectual integrity and honesty, and the courage to express his views, whatever the consequences. He is also an ideal collaborator: someone who is happy to share ideas and the credit for the success of the collaborative work at which he excels. He is intellectually stimulating company of the first order, someone whose conversations leave one with a renewed enthusiasm for research, however jaded one may feel after having heard the same old arguments expressed by the usual suspects for the umpteenth time. Griffith Edwards once remarked to me that he always came away from a conversation with Robin feeling ‘intellectually refreshed’. This observation is all the more striking because there were many issues on which Griffith Edwards and Robin Room disagreed.
Gretchen and Robin at the Grand Canyon following a drug research conference in Scottsdale, Arizona
Ian Webster, former Minister for Health and then Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services, Nicola Roxon MP, Robin Room and David Templeman, CEO of Alcohol & Drug Council of Australia, 2012
The State and the Police: Controlling Individuals’ Drinking Patterns

Robin: ‘These papers of mine look at state control, for example barring specific individuals from clubs or events, as happens today in Britain and in Melbourne. The control measures they describe have evolved from the frustrated response of the political process to alcohol problems and from its decision to support the alcohol industry’s position that their products are not harmful, and caused by a few misguided individuals’ misuse of their ‘relatively harmless’ products.

‘A second avenue into these papers is that our cultures build into us the expectation that we will behave differently when drunk—in fact, that we will often behave badly. So there is a long history of punishing or deterring drunkenness. But on the other hand, our legal systems insist you must have had the intent to commit a crime, and we see intoxication as potentially taking away the ability to form that intent.

‘We ran a conference in Berkeley in the early 1980s on alcohol and disinhibition that looked at these issues from all sides. Then when I was working in Canada, there was a famous case in which the Supreme Court decided intoxication could be a defence concerning sexual assault, so we brought together another set of papers.

‘More recently, I’ve been interested in how the idea of banning specific people from drinking or buying alcohol has come back into play after having been discarded in the 1960s because it was too coercive and an intrusion on privacy.’
Robin Room—An Inspirational Scholar

Robin Room’s influence on my thinking and on my scholarly career has been out of all proportion to the number of times that I have actually met him. Many times I have drawn on his thoughtful and enormously erudite writings to help orient myself to issues, particularly pertaining to the social meanings of alcohol use, that have been crucial in the development of my research on drinking and driving and on the causes and prevention of alcohol-related violence.

What distinguishes Robin’s work from so many social scientists’ is the depth and intellectual coherence of his scholarly output, spanning many decades. He has been like a terrier with a problem all his adult life—a really substantial problem: the explanation of the evolution of drug and alcohol policies globally in the light of history and social change. It is his persistence in pursuing a sociological mystery, and the formidable intellectual resources that he brings to bear, that make his writings such a treasure trove for researchers and students.

It is not surprising that Robin is such an amazing scholar, given his parentage. I had the privilege of helping to organise the retirement dinner for his father at the University of Sydney in 1968. I was at the time Vice-President of the Sydney University Mathematics Society and Robin’s father, Professor T.G. Room, lectured me in geometry—hardly a symbol of which I understood! Robin’s mother, a truly delightful woman that I was fortunate to be seated next to, was I think a biologist, and I am certain from my vivid memories of our conversation that Robin’s capacity to comprehend complex systems and abstract modes of thought stems as much from her intellectual pedigree as the truly formidable analytic intellect of his father.

I have no memories of meeting Robin at the SUMS dinner (maybe he was in the United States by then), but I clearly recall chatting with him in August 1986 at the Alcohol Research Group at Berkeley. I gave him a copy of a report I had just written on the effects of mass random breath testing in New South Wales, and recall a subsequent letter from him in which he noted the depth and rigour of my work. We all need encouragement, but at that time I was in particular need of this kind of positive feedback since I really had no idea of the currency or relevance in the alcohol field of the criminological concepts on deterrence that I had been developing.

Such encouragement has been a hallmark of my few direct interactions with Robin over the years. He is generous with his time and with his praise, surely the hallmark of a great scholar and teacher. I have learned so much from him about the
history and culture of my own country and how the peculiarities of Australian drinking practices are perhaps not all that peculiar when viewed alongside those of other countries. I have long admired the incisive nature of his analyses of drug and alcohol policies, and the way that he makes an extraordinarily important contribution to public debate while maintaining his primary status as an eminent social scientist firmly grounded in empirical evidence.

In short, Robin has long been for me, and remains today, an inspiration. He is a model of the engaged scholar.

Amy Pennay

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Robin made a powerful impression on me when we first had the opportunity to work together in 2010. I was a junior researcher in the evaluation team at the Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre tasked with writing a tender to evaluate a local government area public drinking law in the Melbourne district of Yarra. My supervisor at the time suggested that I approach Robin about lending his name to the application and advising on the proposal. Having not worked with Robin, but being aware of his reputation and seniority, I was surprised when he responded enthusiastically about being involved in this very small project and also provided detailed comments on the application the very day I sent it to him. Over time I have learned that this is Robin’s way—he doesn’t say no if someone asks for his assistance and he will work until midnight to provide genuinely thoughtful feedback on others’ work in an impressively timely way.

This very small project turned out to be highly controversial, as the newly enforced public drinking law was negatively impacting a group of Indigenous drinkers in Yarra and the councillors were accused of racism and lacking cultural sensitivity. As such, the commissioners of this piece of work were very tense about the nature of our findings and I was regularly summoned to speak to the councillors at their monthly meetings. This involved standing in front of twelve very critical councillors at 8pm on a Monday night, all of whom were looking for a way to either have our evaluation support their (varied and opposing) views, or rubbish the methodology so that the evaluation could be disregarded as unscientific. To date, it is still the most challenging and anxiety-provoking project I have ever worked on.

I had not worked with Robin previously and this project was not located in
Robin’s group (the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research); he was simply an adviser on the project. Nevertheless, he attended every project meeting and accompanied me every time I was summoned to speak before the Yarra councillors, before and after business hours. He sat quietly and observed, letting me develop my research and presentation skills, but would speak up when he felt it was necessary. One example of this is when one of the councillors, upon hearing of my intent to interview traders and drinkers, claimed that representing the anecdotal views of purposely selected members of the community was not research. Robin interjected at this point and suggested that the councillor was seriously undervaluing the quality and rigour of my research and the thoughtfulness of my qualitative synthesis. The councillor then apologised to me.

Again, when it came to writing the report, Robin gave me timely and detailed feedback and then crossed his name off as an author on the report—he didn’t think his contribution warranted authorship. In reality, it did. But he said he was happy just to be mentioned in the Acknowledgements section.

After this experience I decided I wanted to work with Robin. Having such a supportive manager was an opportunity I couldn’t let pass. He was very receptive and found room in his program’s budget for me, and I have been a CAPR staff member ever since. Robin and I went on to attract more funding for public drinking research and I have published a number of papers on this topic, including one co-written with him. He supported me through the final three years of my PhD, has pushed me to broaden my analytical skills, has advocated for advances in my employment, and is now supervising me through a four-year competitively funded postdoctoral fellowship.
Dear Robin,

When I’m thinking about our encounters over the years, the memories of you that come to my mind are many and pleasant. They include your eager participation and constructive comments in discussions at KBS meetings, your impressive and enviable overview and recollection of relevant literature in our work with alcohol and drug policies, your extensive hospitality including the enjoyable dinners we’ve had in your homes in three different parts of the world, and your keen interest in collaboration and ability to bring together and inspire colleagues in several Nordic projects. These encounters have always been a good mix of stimulating work and socialising in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Your many generous invitations to share work, ideas or meals can hardly be returned. But you have a standing invitation to come and visit me in Oslo. On a previous visit here, many years ago, you gave me a mushroom knife. Since then I have thought about bringing our shared interest in eatable mushrooms from the dinner table and into the forest. Maybe next time you are visiting in Oslo?

With gratitude and warm regards,

Ingeborg
Robin Room—Egalitarian Soul

The first time I met Robin was at the Kettil Bruun Society meeting in Berkeley in 1988, the year I finished my PhD. My husband, Reg, was attending a conference in San Francisco a week after KBS, so we decided to drive out from Ontario (about 4000 km). We had a great trip out (fell in love with the American desert) but were tired and arguing about something or other as we were unloading at the Berkeley student residences where we were staying. I was hoping we wouldn’t see anyone until we had settled in and were in a better frame of mind. So who is the first person we bump into in the elevator? Robin Room. He was well known to me, as he was to many, and I greatly admired his work, but I had never met him. Despite our never having met, he initiated a conversation with us and, when I told him my name, he knew who I was and what I would be presenting at the conference. Thus, the first thing I found out about Robin was that he treated everyone with the same respect, from the most junior student to the most established researcher. And he did so effortlessly because he was interested in research and it didn’t matter who was doing it—if you were doing something interesting, he wanted to hear about it.

Some years later Robin came to Ontario to be vice president for research at the Addiction Research Foundation. This change was possibly the most important influence on my research career. I was working as a scientist in the program evaluation unit in London, Ontario, a position I had sort of fallen into. I enjoyed the work, especially working with the various treatment programs, but was not finding the research itself very challenging. Robin changed all that. We, in London, were now given the go-ahead to do investigator-driven research (not just evaluation) and Robin encouraged me to pursue research on alcohol and aggression, the topic that had started my career. With Robin, research became fun, exciting, stimulating. It was also of practical importance, at least in part because of the strong and congenial ties between Robin and the then vice president of programs and services, Karen Goldenberg. They created a synergy of combining research and practice that I had never seen before or since.

It was a very sad time when ARF was merged to become the Center for Addiction and Mental Health. As well as losing the ARF identity, we lost Robin too. However, in subsequent years I have had lots of opportunities to continue working and learning from Robin through his kind and generous invitations to present at the various conferences he has organised, as well as through the many meetings of the
Gender, Alcohol and Culture: an International Study—although I can’t say that I share his love of meetings! Over these years, I have been able to observe the pervasiveness of his influence on alcohol research and the large number of young researchers who have benefited from their association with him. I would guess that the people whose thinking and research he has influenced number in the thousands. I was pleased to be president of KBS at the time we chose to honour Robin’s immense contribution by naming him Honorary President for Life.

I’m sure others will talk about how smart Robin is, his encyclopaedic knowledge, his unmatched contributions to alcohol research and the warm hospitality that he and Gretchen extend to so many colleagues. But for me what stands out is his quiet, subtle, gentle and generous support to other researchers, regardless of their rank—an impact that is often uncredited and is mostly unmeasurable, except for events like this one.
This tribute appears in the Acknowledgements of my recent book, Alcohol and Violence: the Nature of the Relationship and the Promise of Prevention (2014).

Robin Room is the quintessential scholar, someone driven by ideas and the insatiable need to understand the complex and sometimes surprising relationship between society and alcohol. Robin always has questions; he is, of course, an empirical researcher of the first rate, creative and pioneering in the use of survey research to study drinking patterns and problems, but along with the most useful answers about this relationship, Robin always has questions: Are we sure we know what we think we know, and what else might be going on? One of the lessons I learned and continue to learn from Robin is that what appears to be may not be the whole story, and that one should keep peeling the layers of the onion off until the core knowledge is revealed. Robin is also a great recruiting agent for the field of alcohol research—he is always looking to bring in new folks with new perspectives who can bring new light to old questions, or explore unexplored aspects. Robin’s direct influence on this book comes from a question he once put to me after we had attended one of these classic discussions of ‘what is known and not known’, up till then about alcohol and various social behaviours; Robin asked me, has anyone done a long-term time series analysis of alcohol and violence in the United States? I said no, not to my knowledge; Robin turned to me and said, ‘you should do it’. The effect of that comment shows directly in several chapters in this book where we have used interrupted time series models as well as other dynamic and over time statistical methods to investigate various aspects of this complex and surprising relationship.

And this inscription appears on the cover page of the copy of the book I gave Robin at the last Kettil Bruun Society meeting in Torino.
June 8, 2014 Torino

To Robin:

Thank you for being an example of the scholar, leading the life of a seeker of knowledge, always asking questions, never being satisfied with the answers. Thank you for your openness, the way you welcome anyone with an interest in questions, the helping hand you offer without hesitation. You inspire and encourage. Thank you. Rob Parker
Letters from Robin’s Children

Gretchen: For a research scientist, it would certainly have helped to grow up with parents like Robin’s. His father, Gerald, was a mathematician with a rational, puzzle-solving, scientific approach to thinking and living. Robin’s mother, Jessica, was a literature major and amateur musician and biologist who valued a deft turn of phrase framed by correct grammar. She drew out of her three children patience, persistence and the skills that develop remarkable memories. Both Robin’s parents were constant readers and writers. Jessica wrote articles for the local newspaper and, when he was away during the war, Gerald wrote stories for the children.

But the most important thing Robin learned from them was a way of being with and trusting children, which he describes as, ‘from the beginning, respect your children as if they were little adults’. Robin became a father early by today’s practices, and feels fathering has been one of the most important of his life’s ongoing works—in some ways the most important. I know this is absolutely true because only his children have the power to completely take him away from his work, and the power to—very occasionally—make him worried enough to stop whistling.

This section of letters from his children is a wonderful surprise for Robin, organised by Margaret Hamilton.
Dear Dad,

Thank you for being an amazing force of positivity in my life. Through our fifty years together you have played so many roles in my life, including father, protector, provider, teacher, role model, adviser and employer. Even with you out of the country for almost half my life, you have had a tremendous influence on who I am today.

As I reflect, I realise I could probably write a book on all the ways you have been there for and with me. I will mention some of things that are at the forefront of my mind today.

Some of my fondest childhood memories are story time with you reading us books like *The Magic Pudding* and *The Hobbit*. I loved how you voiced the characters and varied your voice and cadence to match the pacing in the story. Little did I know that listening to you perform the stories was exercising my imagination and would ultimately lead me into a lifelong love affair with reading, learning and storytelling.

I recall camping trips, especially to Yosemite and Clearwater Falls, where I learned camping skills and acquired your love of waterfalls and wildflowers, being in nature and playing badminton. I remember visiting dinosaur fossils on the way to Colorado and log rolling in Strawberry Lake in British Columbia. I remember getting to stay at a motel whenever it rained two nights in a row. I remember helping you put up the tent at night, which took thirty minutes, and how, no matter what the problem, you would figure out a way to work around it. I remember how whenever we got lost you somehow found the way. When I lament how your granddaughter Melia does not want to go camping any more, I remember how my twelve-year-old self also refused to go camping so I could spend my summers playing baseball with friends. I smile knowing that I still love camping (and my friends) but don’t have anything to do with baseball any more.

Your resourcefulness, which I see as grounded in your immense knowledge of how things work, has always been inspiring for me and certainly has a lot to do with my curiosity and love of learning, problem-solving and tinkering. I remember countless in-depth conversations about topics most people don’t even think about. I have felt I could ask you anything. You were like my internet before the internet. If Apple ever comes up with a really smart personal assistant to replace Siri that understands how things work and world history, they should name it ‘Robin’ (or ‘Dad’).

I have always enjoyed our conversations and how you are able to even-handedly debate issues. I have learned not only how to think logically and express my
thoughts but also how to analyse complex issues and see multiple perspectives. I greatly enjoy, value and am enriched by our continuing conversations. Through our interactions in my formative years, you instilled in me a sweeping curiosity and a passion for justice. This combination has led me to believe in the possibility of change through the exercise of my creativity and will. Thank you for helping make my life interesting and meaningful.

I remember our red Volkswagen bus with the platform in the back for us kids to lounge on—pre-seatbelts, obviously. As we passed through the western states, I remember making it all the way through singing ‘99 Bottles Hanging on the Wall’, and playing I Spy with My Little Eye. All these years later, I remember the night I left for college. At that time, that old bus, increasingly rickety, would begin to shake ominously as it reached 55mph. That night, my friend Jose crashed the bus into a tree while driving people home from my farewell party. I remember that you were away and when you returned I really appreciated that you did not make the crash a distraction from my transition to college life. I remember you buying an old yellow Pinto wagon whose appearance was a great deterrent for such accidents. Nevertheless, you still welcomed my friends hanging out at the house, even if the levels in the wine bottles may have lowered a bit when you were away on trips.

I recall travelling to England with you and the family in the 1970s and to New Zealand and Sydney with you in the early 1990s—that was a seminal trip for me—and I remember conversations about the interesting and exciting places your work had taken you. Thank you so much for opening my eyes to the world. I definitely got the travel bug from you.

I have fond memories of visiting you in Toronto, Sweden and just recently in Melbourne with Melia. It touched my heart to spend a week with you and Gretchen and for Melia to have the experience of spending so much time with you both. I feel like my relationship with Melia has improved since that trip and look forward to the next opportunity for all of us to vacation together.

Thank you for always being there, for supporting my vision and for embedding in me a sense of justice and a discerning view of history. Thank you for being an ardent supporter of me and my work. Without your support, it is likely I would not be doing my life’s work, which is my purpose. You have enabled me to do what I love and to positively impact the lives of many children.

On November 4th, 2008, the eve of Obama’s historic victory, you sent me this letter. I include it here so all can see who you really are.

Dear David,

This Election Day, before any result (other than Dixville Notch) is announced, seemed like a good moment to write to you about what’s been on my mind throughout the long election campaign.

It’s a story about the early 1960s and what mattered most then to us. It’s been
brought to mind again and again when I see Obama. For one thing, to me he looks a lot like you. But much more importantly, seeing him brings back to me the sense of that time and of what we did and hoped for then. I am often moved to the point of tears in my eyes.

Liz and I met in SLATE, a student political party, so called because it ran a slate of candidates on a platform in the student elections at Cal. SLATE was an independent Left group—we called ourselves ‘New Left’, as opposed to the old ideological groups of the social democrats (YPSL), the Trotskyites (YSL) and the proto-communists (Du Bois Clubs). They all came fishing in our waters, so we were a kind of town meeting of the Berkeley Left. Before the Free Speech Movement (in 1964, just after you were born) transformed everything, the Berkeley Left was a mailing list of about 200 (I know, because I typed it up), and our monthly ‘general assemblies’ usually had about thirty people at them.

When we met, Liz had just been elected treasurer and I was elected administrative officer. She didn’t know how to keep books, so teaching that (I don’t remember how I knew it) was part of our courtship.

SLATE had four issue-oriented working committees: Peace (mostly opposing nuclear testing), Farm Labour (supporting the organising of California farm workers), Civil Liberties (against capital punishment and some other things, but mostly about defending the Left from what McCarthyites were trying to do to us) and Civil Rights (about the Black freedom struggle). But the issue which moved us all, which dominated our hearts and taught us our tactics, was civil rights. This was true of the whole student movement of the early 1960s—starting sometime around the time of the lunch-counter sit-ins in 1959. We picketed Woolworths while I was at Princeton, and got slightly roughed up by the southern students there for our pains. Black civil rights was the soul and the motor of the (mostly White) student movement.

This was the early 1960s, before things became complicated with the Black Power movement of 1968 and later. We were moved by Martin Luther King and the early Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, of which now-Congressman John Lewis was a leader), and our commitment was to an America in which people were not known and their fate was not decided by the colour of their skin. Integration was the watchword.

In other words, our aspirations and our deepest hopes for the world and for America were very close to what Barack Obama has been exemplifying all through his campaign, and to what he says at the moments when he has to say something rather than just live it.

This is the background for how you became my son. You have heard this part of the story before. Liz would talk in front of friends about how we wanted six children (I don’t think I ever bought completely into the number!). But we recognised already that there were a lot of people in the world even without our efforts, so we had some formula like: we would have two, and then adopt the rest. But then, our friend Jan Pusina came to us and said that he had a friend who was pregnant and looking for
a couple to adopt her child, and how about it? We talked it over and stewed about it briefly. What would it be like for you as a teenager to have White parents? And we had assumed natural children first, and then adopted. But was there anything special about that order? We decided ‘no’, and told Jan that the answer was ‘yes’. Looking back, I think our motivation was very like what the feminists talked about a few years later: to make the political personal. We could live out in our lives our deepest political commitment. At least at the level of our own lives, we could make work what we wanted at the societal level. Some other people I knew in the student movement did other similar things—always quietly, without making a fuss about it.

I think it must have been some version of the same impulse that moved Obama’s mother to marry the Kenyan foreign student (and may well have been involved in your birth parents’ getting together). The commitments were by our generation, but of course the commitments also involved your generation. Barack and you and Kate and many others were conscripted into the enterprise, whether you liked it or not. And American society did change around us, but much too slowly. Only now, in reading about the election campaign, do I get a sense that things are really heading the way we hoped they would be—that in some way the main hope of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech may be fulfilled.

Whether or not that is so, of course, does not change the fact that you became my son, or the love we have between us. I am proud of you, and I love you dearly.

I hope you do not mind my telling you this story. Happy election day!

By the way, Gretchen and I are planning to be in Berkeley on December 17–22. It will be great to see Melia and you.

Love, Dad/Farfar

For all the roles that you have played in my life, the most important one has been simply being Dad. Thank you so much for giving the little me the greatest gift I have ever received. Had you and Mom not adopted me, I would have gone into the foster care system—I would not have had a ‘real’ family, I would not have had a ‘real’ Dad or a Mom, and I would not have had Melia. I cannot imagine who I would be now.

I am ever so grateful to be your son. So much of you is in me and will always be with me. Being adopted into this family was clearly the best thing that could have happened to me.

Thank you so much!

Your loving son,

David
Catherine Room

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

Good job, Dad! But aren’t you ever going to retire?

My thoughts are with you in love and joy. Though you really make me crazy sometimes, I always want the best for you and love you.

Your daughter,
Kate

Joshua Room

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, USA

There is obviously a full volume’s worth that I could say about Robin Room, my father, who has been my lifelong idol and inspiration. I feel remarkably blessed to have had him as my Dad. In fact, I distinctly recall attending a Men’s Group meeting when I was in college during which most if not all of the men in the room discussed their negative issues with their fathers. When my turn came, I had nothing but good things to say. (This caused a certain pall to fall over the discussion.) Though I have never quite understood his supreme dedication to his work (I inherited many of his qualities, but perhaps not that one, or at least not in the same strength), I have always admired it. In the same way, I have always admired his prodigious intellect, his quiet humility and his authentic passion for making real and lasting change in the world.

Though he has always been a big traveller and otherwise involved in his work, he has been a wonderful father and role model. He always made time to be with us kids. Some of my fondest memories are lazy weekends with him at Lawrence Hall of Science, and especially the summers we spent camping in Yosemite and all over the Northwest. I particularly recall, as those who know him will not be surprised to hear, that there was never any need for extra clothing for camping or hiking where my Dad was concerned. He would tramp up and down the mountains in Yosemite (our favourite was the Ten Lakes trail) wearing his same uniform of workman’s pants and a button-down shirt. His only concession was that on occasion (not always) he would trade his usual quasi-dress shoes for some form of sneaker (usually of exotic
origin, like the red suede pair I particularly recall coming from Poland). Having his pocket full of pens and his ubiquitous pocket planner/calendar worked out well, on occasion, when he would use the latter to press wildflowers picked from the trail.

For the many years that he worked at the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley, his workplace was also a second home for his family. This was partly because he could usually be found there, and partly because there was a family atmosphere to the place (particularly under his leadership as director) that welcomed us all in. I cannot imagine my childhood and teen years without that place (particularly the 1816 Scenic location). It even provided me with employment on occasion in my teen years (and for some of my friends), though I later learned that Dad was paying me and/or my friends out of his own pocket, rather than out of office funds. He is, as we all know, scrupulously honest, and especially careful about fiscal matters.

But it was during my own relatively brief foray as a professional into the world of alcohol and drug research (between 1995 and 1998 or so) that I truly came to appreciate my father’s eminence in this field, his passionate attachment to his work and his connection to the people he works with around the world. My work at ARG at that time (for which I will always be grateful to Lee Ann Kaskutas, Connie Weisner and Laura Schmidt, among others) allowed me to more fully appreciate my father’s contributions. And when I attended the Kettil Bruun Society meeting in Oporto, Portugal, in 1995, I decided that I needed to change my last name to Robinson, because EVERYONE I met, upon hearing my name, said (warmly), ‘Oh, so you’re Robin’s son!’ Seeing your own father through the admiring or adoring eyes of those who have known him professionally for so many years is a wonderful thing, and it confirmed my own admiration for him.

I have always been proud to call Robin Room my father. I hope to emulate his generosity of spirit, his warmth and his grace. He once said to me that I reminded him a lot of himself at the age I was then, but that I seemed to pull it off with more grace. I think the opposite is true. I can only aspire to be the man he has been, and to affect the world as he has done.

Josh
Saturday morning breakfast on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 2011
What Will People Remember Most?

Robin: ‘I suppose I will be remembered for framing the two worlds of alcohol problems—the world of drinking that causes crises and loss of family, employment, and control, and the other world of the drinkers who do not end up unemployed, divorced or in a drink-driving incident. But in the end, the people of both these worlds suffer the health consequences of alcohol use. French epidemiologist Georges Péquignot said, “If you drink enough, you die of alcohol-related brain disease in your 40s; if you drink a bit less than that, you die of liver cirrhosis in your 50s, a bit less, and you die of alcohol-related cancer in your 60s”.

‘But what I would like to be remembered for is my helping to build community, particularly communities of scholarship, and for doing my best as a father and companion and friend.’
Robin’s PhD Students

United States, while at the University of California, Berkeley

Robin: ‘I supervised about thirty-five postdoctoral fellows, working on a variety of epidemiological, historical and sociological topics relating to alcohol and other drugs.’ Robin also supervised or served on about twenty dissertation committees.

- Genevieve Ames, Maternal alcoholism and family life, PhD, Medical Anthropology, UC San Francisco, 1982
- James Baumohl, Dashaways and doctors: the treatment of habitual drunkards in San Francisco from the gold rush to Prohibition, DSW, UC Berkeley, 1986
- Kim Bloomfield, Community in recovery: a study of social support, spirituality, and voluntarism among gay and lesbian members of Alcoholics Anonymous, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1990
- Raul Caetano, Drinking patterns and alcohol problems among Hispanics in Northern California, PhD, Epidemiology, UC Berkeley, 1983
- Nancy Day, Alcohol and mortality: separating the drink from the drinker, PhD, Epidemiology, UC Berkeley, 1978
- Herman Gonzalez-Avedano, Ideologies of drinking: public and professional ideas on drinking in Costa Rican society, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1984
- Joanne Hall, Lesbians’ experiences with alcohol problems: a critical ethnographic study of problematization, helpseeking and recovery patterns, PhD, Nursing, UC San Francisco, 1992
- Denise Herd, The socio-cultural correlates of drinking patterns in Black and White Americans: results from a national survey, PhD, Medical Anthropology, UC San Francisco, 1985
- Marjorie Hunt, Children of Alcoholics: family of origin factors and adult outcomes among the middle generation of a three-generation longitudinal panel, PhD, Social Welfare, UC Berkeley, 1989
- Rhonda Jones (Webb), The socio-economic context of alcohol use and depression: results from a national survey of Black and White adults in the general population, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1989
- Lee Ann Kaskutas, An analysis of Women for Sobriety, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1992
- Kathleen McBurney, Women in prison: a survey of nutrition-related health problems as perceived by female inmates and ex-offenders, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1988
• Amanda Noble, Law, medicine, and women’s bodies: the social control of pregnant drug users, PhD, Sociology, UC Davis, 1992
• Madelon Powers, Faces along the bar: lore and order in the workingmen’s saloon, 1870–1920, PhD, History, UC Berkeley, 1991
• Ronald Stall, Alcohol use and aging: the results of a 19-year prospective study, Medical Anthropology, UC San Francisco, 1984
• Cheryl Stephens (Cherpitel), Alcohol consumption, perception of pregnancy and social support: a study of pregnant women in a southern city, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1984
• Pamela Street, Medication misuse by older people: a sociocultural investigation, PhD Medical Anthropology, UC San Francisco, 1986
• Christine Vourakis, The process of recovery for women in Alcoholics Anonymous: seeking groups ‘like me’, PhD, Nursing, UC San Francisco
• Constance Weisner, Paths to treatment: a study of critical events, DrPH, UC Berkeley, 1987

Canada, while at the Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto

Robin was one of the supervisors for the following dissertations:
• Misha Levin, The 1985 alcohol reform in the USSR: a case of rejected moral reform, PhD, Sociology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1999
• Peter Ferentzy, The addiction concept: how the language of sin was replaced by that of disease, PhD, Social and Political Thought, York University, Toronto, 2000
• Sandra Bullock, About last night: dates, drinks and sex—a study of the association between alcohol use and sexual activity among heterosexuals, including sexual behaviour at high risk for the transmission of STDs and HIV, PhD, Public Health Science, University of Toronto, 2001
• Luba Magdenko, Societies in transition: alcohol misuse and control in Ukraine, PhD, Public Health Science, University of Toronto, 2005

Sweden, while at SoRAD, Stockholm University

Robin supervised the following dissertations:
• Kalle Tryggvesson, Freedom in a bottle: young Swedes on rationales and norms for drunken behaviour, PhD, Criminology, 2005
• Jessica Palm, Moral concerns—treatment staff and user perspectives on alcohol and drug problems, PhD, Criminology, 2006
• Jessica Storbjörk, The social ecology of alcohol and drug treatment: client experiences in context, PhD, Sociology, 2006
• Klara Hradilova (Selin), Measuring harm from drinking in Sweden: self-reports from drinkers in the general population, PhD, Sociology, 2006
• Sharon Rødner Sznitman, Socially integrated drug users: between deviance and normality, PhD, Sociology, 2007
Robin’s PhD Students

- Jenny Cisneros (Örnberg), The Europeanization of Swedish alcohol policy, PhD, Political Science, 2009
- Nina-Katri Gustafsson, Bridging the world: alcohol policy in transition and diverging alcohol patterns in Sweden, PhD, Sociology, 2010

New Zealand

Robin co-supervised the following:
- Brett Maclennan, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, University of Otago (PhD awarded 2010)

Australia, at the University of Melbourne

Robin supervised to completion the following:
- Michael Livingston, The effects of changes in the availability of alcohol on consumption, health and social problems, PhD, Centre for Health and Society, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, 2012
- Anne-Marie Laslett, Alcohol and child maltreatment in Australia through the windows of child protection and a national survey, PhD, Centre for Health and Society, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, 2013

Robin is currently involved in supervising the following theses in progress:
- Caroline Clark (submitted), Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne
- Harindra Jayasekara (submitted), Epidemiology, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne
- Claire Wilkinson, Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne
- Paula O’Brien, Law School, University of Melbourne
- Jacqueline Bowden, Psychology, University of Adelaide
- Brian Vandenbergen, Health Economics, Monash University
- Sharon Matthews, Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University

Robin has been a ‘reading member’ or a ‘consulting member’ for many other PhD efforts. He has also been the opponent—a formal outside examiner—for four European PhD candidates.
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Oh there once was a swagman camped in the billabong, under the shade of a coolibah tree and he sang as he looked at his old billy boiling who'll come a waltzing matilda with me.

Down came the squatter riding his thoroughbred down came the squatter whose is the jumbuck you've got in your tucker bag? You'll come a waltzing matilda with me.

They sang as they stowed him away in his tucker bag, you'll come a waltzing matilda with me.

Wholl come a waltzing matilda my darling who'll come a waltzing matilda with me, wholl come a waltzing matilda with me.

Waltzing matilda a leading a water bag who'll come a waltzing matilda with me, wholl come a waltzing matilda with me.

But the swagman fell up he jumped in the water hole drowning himself in the coolibah tree and his ghost may be heard risings in the billabong, who'll come a waltzing matilda with me.

Calligraphy art by Dave Wood, FSSI, Pomona, Queensland, <www.davewood.com.au>