LEONARD I. PEARLIN

A TRIBUTE AND REMEMBRANCE
Leonard I. Pearlin created a body of work that has set the course for the sociological study of stress since its inception and did so with a warmth and grace equal to the preeminence of his scholarship, qualities that endeared him to his colleagues. He passed away on July 23, 2014, at the age of 89 after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife Gerrie, daughters Susan and Gina, and grandson Derick. Len also leaves behind a small army of colleagues who also count him as a cherished friend.

Len Pearlin was born December 26, 1924, in Quincy, MA, the birthplace of two presidents, John and John Quincy Adams, a fact he took pleasure in reporting, perhaps because his parents were immigrants from the Ukraine and Latvia. After being wounded during his military service in the South Pacific in World War II, for which he was awarded a Purple Heart, Len returned to the United States under the sole surviving son policy after his two older brothers were killed, and a loss he carried throughout his life.

Len received his BA in sociology from Oklahoma University in 1949. He intended to study Social Anthropology but chose sociology instead because, as he was fond of explaining, the line to sign up was shorter and his young wife was waiting for him. Len received his PhD from Columbia University in 1956, writing his dissertation under the direction of Herbert Hyman while also teaching at a Women’s College in Greensboro, NC. He then went to Ohio State University for a year before moving to the Laboratory of Socio-Environmental Studies at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to work as a Research Scientist. For more than two decades at NIMH, Len collaborated with a number of other influential sociologists, including Melvin Kohn, Morris Rosenberg, and Carmi Schooler, to contribute a number of seminal papers in the emerging area of the sociology of mental health. It was during this time that he conducted his classic Chicago study, which introduced concepts and measures that would go on to change the way sociologists thought about stress and the ways in which stress infiltrated people’s lives. This study led directly to the development of the “stress process” with which he is most closely identified.

In 1982, he retired from NIMH to become Professor in the Human Development and Aging Program at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF), assuming the Directorship of that program, 1982–1984. During his tenure at UCSF, Len Pearlin developed and elaborated the stress process paradigm. It would become the dominant model that influenced research on social structure and mental health over the next four decades. He also initiated studies of caregiving for two important populations that could be assumed a priori to be under considerable demand and hardship. The first was a longitudinal study of informal caregivers to persons with AIDS, which evolved quickly into a study of bereavement. The second was a longitudinal study of family caregivers to persons with Alzheimer’s disease, for whom caregiving typically extended for years. Both of these studies were conducted at sites in San Francisco and Los Angeles, in collaboration with Carol S. Aneshensel at the University of California-Los Angeles.

Len retired from UCSF in 1994 and returned to the Washington, DC, area where he became Graduate Professor and Senior Research Scientist in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland. It was during this time that he extended the stress process paradigm to incorporate principles of the life course perspective. In collaboration with Scott Schieman, he conducted still another influential study of stress and health, in this case among the older population. He retired in 2007.
Len’s contributions to the field have been monumental. His ideas about the ways in which the social organization of society shapes the psychological well-being of its members form the intellectual roots for a vast body of research on stress and mental health. The publication of “The Structure of Coping” in 1978 and “The Stress Process” in 1981 propelled forward sociological research on how enduring stressors encountered in ordinary daily life lead to the depletion of the very social and psychological resources that might otherwise offset the damaging emotional impact of these stressors. Both of these papers are Citation Classics on the Web of Science. This emphasis on everyday life stood in contrast to the dominant paradigm at the time. It also opened the door to the further conceptual elaboration of the universe of stressors to encompass a much wider array of challenges and obstacles that impinge on people’s mental health.

His 1989 article, “The Sociological Study of Stress,” chastised sociologists for the prevailing tendency to reduce social phenomena to intra-individual processes. This critique reoriented sociological research toward the ways in which social stratification generates differences in risk for psychological distress. The agenda set forth in this paper is still being actualized.

Len also articulated the connections between the stress process and other areas of study. An influential and much cited 1990 paper spelled out concepts and measures for the study of caregiving within gerontology. In 1996 and 2005 articles he spelled out how the stress process and the life course perspective form a paradigmatic alliance. In addition to his theoretical contributions to the field, his empirical research spanned a broad spectrum of social life including work and the family, aging and the life course, and caregiving. His research has a lasting legacy.

This extraordinary record of scholarly achievement garnered Len a lengthy list of accolades. He was the 1991 recipient of the Leo G. Reeder Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Medical Sociology from the American Sociological Association. In 1992, he received the award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychiatric Sociology from the Society for the Study of Social Problems. That same year, he received a MERIT Award from the NIMH. He received the award for Lifetime Contributions to the Sociology of Mental Health from the ASA Mental Health Section in 1996. In 1998, he was named recipient of the ASA Distinguished Career Award for the Practice of Sociology. Leonard Pearlin also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Ghent in Belgium. He was the 2004 recipient of the Distinguished Career Contribution Award of the Behavior and Social Sciences Section of the Gerontological Society of America.

His service in other capacities is also noteworthy. He was a special grants consultant for a host of National Institutes of Health review committees for more than 40 years. Len also served on the Advisory Committee of the National Institute on Aging and on the Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee of the Alzheimer’s Association. He served on the National Board of the Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Association as well as the Advisory Committee of the Herczeg Institute on Aging in Israel. Len was Editor of the Journal of Health and Social Behavior from 1982–1984.

Len was one of the finest mentors in the discipline. He trained a number of outstanding doctoral students who have gone on to have excellent careers. He always had time to encourage and support the work of new researchers. He helped to launch the careers of a number of people who have gone on to make important contributions to the field in their own work. Len has been a helpful and approachable colleague.
whose efforts have resulted in a stronger and more vibrant field. In 2000, Len and Gerrie generously established the Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Sociological Study of Mental Health.

As much as Len is esteemed by his colleagues, this regard is surpassed by their affection for him.

Carol S. Aneshensel, University of California-Los Angeles

William R. Avison, The University of Western Ontario

MEMORIES OF LEN

Peggy A. Thoits, Indiana University

Every year I teach a graduate seminar in social psychology, with a week devoted to stress theory and mental health. And every year I tell my students that the Mental Health Section is where you can find the nicest people in the ASA -- that’s where the stress researchers are concentrated. And every time I say this, it’s Len I’m thinking of. Len’s humanity, warmth, understanding, and generosity of spirit permeated every personal conversation and shone through in his writings. He was our guide and our model, making us all finer people (and thinkers and researchers) than we might have been on our own.
Len’s humanity was evident in his insistence that everyday psychological distress is crucial to study. “...[S]ocial stress is not about unusual people doing unusual things and having unusual experiences” (Pearlin 1999: 396), in contrast to psychiatric theory and its categorizations of mental abnormalities. Stress theory focuses on ordinary people grappling with difficult circumstances stemming from their locations in the social and economic structures of society. In his insistence on this, Len kept our attention on documenting and explaining the effects of people’s social statuses on all aspects of the stress process – the stressors experienced, the coping attempts made, the personal resources drawn upon, the social support available, and the unequal distributions of anguish and worry in the population. A further implication of this thought, repeated in Len’s stress process overviews, was that people in disadvantaged social positions will not only suffer from a proliferation of stressors but from a relative lack of multiple protective factors, not just one factor such as low mastery or inaccessible support (Pearlin 1999; Pearlin and Bierman 2013). He argued the conjunction of disadvantages that accompany low social status has yet to be thoroughly pursued, giving us a repeated gentle nudge in a direction needing further exploration.

Len’s nuanced understandings of ordinary people’s dilemmas stemmed from his long-term practice of first conducting in-depth qualitative interviews before constructing questions for large-scale surveys. Here again he set us an example. His careful qualitative work led to rich elaborations of stress, coping, and support dynamics, adding concepts such as primary and secondary stressors, ambient neighborhood strains, meaning-focused coping responses, and mismatches between support needed and support given, to cite only a few key elaborations that have led us to new insights and new hypotheses.

Len’s delineation with Carmi Schooler of what might be called “meaning-focused” coping strategies originated in such in-depth interviews (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Psychologists distinguish primarily between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), folding meaning-based strategies into one or the other very general category. Len and Carmi abstracted these tactics as a category in their own right: when people are constrained in their ability to change stressful circumstances, they can shift their perceptions or interpretations of those difficult circumstances, exercising agency even when agency seems precluded. And, as always in his work, Len documented social status and role-based variations in the use of such self-protective strategies. The dignity and respect that Len accorded to the lives and struggles of ordinary individuals shine through in this article, indeed, in all of his work. I have always admired and wished to emulate Len’s deep understanding and appreciation of his respondents and his eloquence in conveying the poignancy of the hardships and the constraints in their lives.

Decades later, Len, together with Alex Bierman, circled back again to the issue of meaning, leaving us another road sign to future directions: “The study of relevant beliefs and values [i.e., meanings] and their influence in molding subjective understandings of life circumstances is potentially a sociologically rich way to identify additional conditions that further explicate the frequent finding that the same circumstances can have appreciably different consequences for mental health (Pearlin and Bierman 2013: 334).
Thank you, Len, for this and other signposts. I cannot imagine what we will do as we go forward without your sweet smile, encouragement, and guidance.

Heather A. Turner, University of New Hampshire

It is perhaps not at all surprising that Leonard Pearlin was my most influential professor in graduate school and continued to be an incredibly influential colleague throughout the two decades that followed. Much of my professional development and research training, which laid the foundation to what I believe has been successful career, I attribute to Len’s mentorship. Yet he was more than a wise adviser and teacher; he fostered a real sense of excitement in the research process and, through our many interactions and discussions, made me feel like a smart, valued and capable collaborator.

Reflecting on my years in graduate school working with Len, it strikes me how his mentorship helped me develop a strong sense of mastery- a concept that Len used and emphasized in much of his research. I left graduate school confident that I would succeed, that I would do well in my career, and that I could make important contributions. Len offered advice, guidance, and encouragement, making an effort to know and respect my goals and interests, while also modeling, quite perfectly, how a scholar thinks and works.

One of the many examples of Len’s mentorship was his efforts to include me in paper-writing at a very early stage in graduate school. Fresh out of college, I’m sure I had little to offer in terms of improving the manuscript. But that early experience importantly changed how I viewed myself; I was no longer “just a student” but also an academic and developing scholar. While a graduate student in the Human Development and Aging Program at UCSF, The AIDS Caregiver Project was a central part of my hands-on research training. Involved in the project from its inception, I was able to apply stress process concepts to a very new and salient issue. I remember many thought-provoking discussions with Len (sometimes over lunch at a favorite Thai restaurant on Irving St.) about the AIDS caregiver project, the themes that emerged from the interviews, the similarities and differences with Alzheimer’s caregivers (a concurrent project), and its broader relevance for understanding how roles and statuses influence mental health. The opportunity to work with Len on every part of the research process, from specifying the research questions that needed answering, to conducting and analyzing qualitative interviews, to developing structured instruments and analyzing survey data, was invaluable. I have used and built upon these skills, enhanced by Len’s particular intellectual style and method, throughout my career. Measurement development, for example, has become a core part of my research expertise. I have no doubt that my experience as a young graduate student working with Len was responsible for my strong interest in continuing to develop those skills.

In terms of the specific content of Len teaching and scholarship, it is difficult to fully express how central the stress process framework is to how I practice sociology and where I look for answers to new research problems. By the time I completed graduate school, the stress process model was already deeply entrenched in my way of thinking about and understanding mental health disparities within and across groups. Since that time, I have conducted many studies on a variety of different topics and populations, but the large majority has had social stress as a fundamental theme. Most recently, I have been very engaged in research on children’s exposure to violence and victimization. This is a highly inter-disciplinary field and I find myself regularly interacting with researchers in psychology, pediatrics, social work, law, and criminal justice. I believe one of the major contributions I have made in this area is conceptualizing child victimization as an often chronic source of stress within the broader context of child and family adversity, rather than as a stand-alone traumatic event. Although sometimes implicit in the child victimization literature, I have argued that a more explicit application of the stress process
framework in this area would help to organize and clarify this large and complex body of research. I continue to share, and incorporate in my collaborations, the type of sociological thinking and ideas engendered in the stress process model that Leonard Pearlin so eloquently developed and elaborated.

Finally, I am fortunate to be the Director for the International Conference on Social Stress Research, a biennial conference specifically devoted to research on the stress process. Although I have served as the Conference Director for only about 13 years, the conference came into existence in the early 1980’s, a time when social stress research was gaining substantial momentum as a core area within medical sociology. I believe Len’s seminal article “The Stress Process” with colleagues Menaghan, Lieberman, and Mullan was not only a major force in creating this momentum, but also in inspiring the development of the conference. Len was a regular participant at the stress conference from its inception through 2012, and the research presented by all participants continues to reflect, in one way or another, the contributions of Len’s work. I am proud to support and direct a conference that so clearly embodies Len’s scholarship and that encourages the continued growth and advancement of this field.

Melissa A. Milkie, University of Toronto
I had the great pleasure of being Len Pearlin’s colleague for about 15 years, between when he “retired” from San Francisco State to when he “retired” from Maryland, moving to Virginia Beach. Over this time, I was a co-investigator on his more than $1 million grant for the Aging, Stress and Health (ASH) study that he began at Maryland, and we co-taught a graduate course, the Sociology of Mental Health, a couple of times. What an amazing presence he was for our department, and our social psychology group, especially.

At Maryland, Len immediately began to pull in students and faculty in his important study of stress processes among the elderly. Len hired students, served as chair on their dissertations, mentored them through ASA fellowships, taught courses, all benefiting Maryland grad students, and all at a salary of $0. Wow! He published with probably a dozen grad students and faculty during this time, rivaling the entire “regular” faculty.

Len impacted my work in ways that are both simple and difficult to articulate. Simple—his brilliance and generosity directly influenced my own writing. We had great discussions about the stress process over the life course as we worked on the ASH grant — and Len made room for me to include variables about parenting in a later wave of the study. Through this, using an integration of life course and stress process theories — and the ASH data — I published some work showing how children—adult children, that is -- continued to influence the mental health of the elderly, even though events that occurred during the years that the adult children were adolescents! This “long reach of stressors” — an integrated perspective of stress and the life course -- continues to influence how I approach research on gender, work & family and mental health.
It’s difficult to convey the indirect, complex ways Len influenced my work and that of others. I loved many things about working with Len. I loved that Len was right about 99.9 percent of the time, regarding sociology and life in general. I always wanted to pull out pen and paper when talking with him so I could write down and thus remember exactly what he said. I loved that he asked for feedback on his ideas, and listened carefully. Honestly, most of the time his own work was so fabulous, he did not need suggestions. But on rare occasion, he would light up at another person’s idea, and then incorporate it gratefully --- and I loved that he was generous with his co-authorship and his praise. More than anyone else I’ve known, his writing, his ideas, his analysis was penetrating and influential. These same brilliant insights people around the world have the benefit of reading about through his many publications, was what I had regularly, for years, in hallway, office, and classroom conversations with Len. His ways of listening, his cogent form of analysis, and his generous mentoring have influenced countless scholars, and for me, how I work with my own students. What an honor and privilege to have shared space – literally and intellectually -- with this amazing scholar for so many years.

Steven A. Zarit, Pennsylvania State University

Len Pearlin’s impact on research on family caregiving was to create, in effect, a foundational template for understanding the unfolding process of stressors and adaptation that has shaped the field since the publication of his landmark paper in 1990 that described stress process of caregiving model (Pearlin, Mullan, Semple and Skaff 1990). In a prescient editorial that accompanied the article, Linda George (1990) called the paper a “tour de force”, and lauded its unique contributions. The paper provided a conceptual framework for a rapidly growing research area that had been largely lacking one. Moreover, the framework transcended the mostly stagnant, cross-sectional accounts of caregiving that dominated the literature by identifying process and context and calling for longitudinal investigations that examine the course of caregiving stressors and how they interact with a caregiver’s other roles, activities and resources. Uniquely, the article also presented a comprehensive set of psychometrically-sound measures for testing the framework. The clarity of the conceptual model was, in effect, enhanced by measures that captured core features of the family stress process.

The model’s promise was realized in the landmark longitudinal study that Len led, and that was summarized in the book, Profiles in Caregiving: The Unexpected Career (Aneshensel, Pearlin, Mullan, Zarit, and Whitlatch 1995). The remarkable synthesis of theory and empirical findings in the book was largely the product of the dynamic interaction between Len and Carol Aneshensel. During a series of meetings of all the authors, Len and Carol carried out an intense, insightful, sometimes sharp and always incredibly stimulating discussion of the findings and their meaning. These discussions led to the book’s strength—its precision in delineating the complexity of the stress process over time in the context of continuity and transitions in the caregiving role. The study remains the foremost longitudinal investigation of family caregivers.

It is rare today to find caregiving research that does not at least acknowledge the stress process model. One of the more significant applications is in guiding the design and evaluation of interventions for caregivers. As George (1990) noted, intervention studies were often then and still are now based on an inadequate understanding of the stress process. In particular, much of the intervention research is guided by simplistic assumptions that brief and often narrowly-focused treatments will lead to sweeping changes in a caregiver’s overall appraisal of burden or emotional distress. The lesson of the stress process model is that caregiving stress is multidimensional and that interventions that address one aspect of this process are likely to have proximal effects that are directly related to that aspect of the process has been modified. My colleagues and I took this approach in studying the benefits of respite
care for caregivers. We began our inquiries by using the stress-process framework by identifying the specific effects on caregivers of the use of respite services such as adult day care. We posited that respite relieves caregivers from a portion of the time, effort and energy they expend on caregiving, and then identified the proximal stress processes that were likely to be affected, including role overload and related processes (e.g., Zarit, Stephens, Townsend, and Greene 1997), and immediate emotional responses on days caregivers received respite (e.g., Zarit, Kim, Femia, Almeida, and Klein 2014). It is through addressing over time these specific links within the stress process framework that we can provide meaningful relief to family caregivers, an outcome which Len would heartily applaud.

Stephani L. Hatch, King’s College London
I met Len in 1998 shortly after joining the Sociology Department at University of Maryland. He was one of the reasons the department was a good fit, but his level of prominence made me slightly nervous about approaching him. Len surprised me by quickly replying to my request and setting a time to meet. I have always admired his work, particularly the clarity with which he presented complex arguments around the experiences of disadvantaged and marginalised groups. However, I was not quite sure how our interaction would play out around topics such as race, gender and class. Like many students from racial minority groups, my past experiences in academia had left me with the reality that this could become a barrier in our interactions. Past meetings with senior faculty also left me with the expectation that Len would spend much of the meeting talking about his own thoughts and work. This was not Len’s approach; after establishing how our general interests overlapped, he quickly focused the conversation on my thinking. He asked me my opinion about where I thought there were knowledge gaps; what were the key questions; and which perspectives were absent. He pressed me to think critically about what I saying, as well as the things that had been said to me. That conversation was the beginning of Len becoming my teacher, my supervisor, and my mentor. Len was a huge champion for the advancement of students from minority status groups, in whatever form. In very direct ways, he encouraged me to have a constant dialogue about how my race, gender and class influenced my academic and professional experiences, as well as my thinking. He gave me many opportunities to express and defend my thinking, publicly and in supervision meetings. He helped me learn how to construct a good argument; when I disagreed with him or wanted to change the direction of my work, he would say, ‘right, you have 10 minutes to convince me’. To this day, I consider defending my position and ideas to be one of my most useful skills. He took every opportunity to socialise me into the discipline; he literally and figuratively brought me and my ideas to the table during campus visits by colleagues and annual ASA meetings. He pushed me to take thoughtful risks and to apply myself beyond the limits I had placed on my capabilities; the two key fellowships that changed my career trajectory were not ones I would have applied for, but his encouragement was direct and clear. He wanted me to be in settings where I could challenge and create options for my future. Up until the point I met Len, I had been encouraged to push boundaries, but I had never been so encouraged to own my worth and believe that my voice needed to be heard. From our first meeting, Len has been and will continue to be my reference for how to share, teach, care and give back.

Blair Wheaton, University of Toronto
I was convinced during the time I was writing my dissertation that the specification of stress was underdeveloped. I had already started to think about chronic stress as a separate form of stress, but I did not have good measures of it. Somewhere in my dissertation, I made the point that stable
inequalities will generate stable differences in stress experience, not captured by life events. Bill Eaton published an article on life events in which he claimed that the effect of stress was limited to two years (1978). It bothered me, because it was just life events.

I was one of the two original reviewers of the stress process paper for JHSB. I had published (obliquely, unfortunately) something on chronic stress the year before in JHSB (1980). But when I saw the stress process paper, I had two different reactions: I was very impressed with the originality and scope and ambition and the side-by-side integrative modeling of events and strain, as well as social and personal resources. No one had done this, obviously, and it was the perfect moment to make the point that the piece by piece approach (e.g., events buffered by support) could be dead wrong, and thus misleading. But, on the other hand, there were some analytical issues I raised as a reviewer—typical of the young—that were pretty sticky. I was insistent. Len later told me I had been “very tough.” But I am proud of that: invisibly, it toned down and removed some things from the paper that could have distracted from its impact and diffusion. That’s what reviews are supposed to do.

I got to meet Len at the first Stress conference: I was naturally intimidated at first, but Len is Len --- I was amazed at his openness, curiosity, and interest in what I was doing. He listened to my paper on chronic stress and told me after it was very important to separate the two types of stress. His paper had already given me the confidence to proceed on this point, and elaborate it.

**Stress vs Strain:** One of my early interactions with Len had to do with the use of the term “chronic strain” or “role strain”. Those discussion were formative for me. I made the point that calling chronic stress “strain” gave the impression it was not stress, preserving the notion that only life events are “stress”. A small and still very important terminological point. But he got it, and he later came around to it. The same issue arose with role strain – does chronic stress only occur in social roles? Just as there has to be stress that does not start or present as an event, there is stress on the outside of roles and the world of roles – ambient, looking in on roles, cross multiple roles, etc. He encouraged me to keep elaborating these ideas towards a more complete understanding of stress. This was very important to me – someone was listening.

**Len’s Writing:** Everyone ultimately has a style in writing. I always admired Len’s gentility in writing. At the same time, it was never wishy-washy. Somehow, he combined challenging points with a style that never seemed to offend. This is, no doubt, a hidden and subtle reason for his influence. When I read what I wrote at the time, it did not have that double-edged quality that Len managed to produce—it tended to be more of a single edge. I always admired this in Len, but I also realized it was just him: he was like this in person as well.

**CRISP:** I have argued in print recently that CRISP, as a group, allowed Len the context to elaborate the stress process, to fill in the spaces, and specify the ideas more concretely. This group met for ten years, and in the paper I presented at the stress conference last summer, I argued that the group was an invisible hand in Len’s 1989 seminal piece on the Sociological Study of Stress. When you meet twice a year, and the conversations go on for two days each, and there are dinners, the back and forth goes deep. Len had noticed the divide in the group between psychology and sociology on stress. This was in the original article, but it had not been entirely fleshed out. He was consistently focused on the proper rooting of stress, and the origins of stress in social inequality. The conversations in CRISP acted as encouragement, elaboration, new ideas, and progressive fine-tuning.
The Stress Process became a community enterprise in part through CRISP, and in tandem with Len’s innate interest in new ideas – but ideas, not stock applications. He privately railed about the tendency to start the study of stress AT stress. Knowing those conversations, you can see the influence in this quote from 1989:

“The essential element of the sociological study of stress is the presence of similar types and levels of stress among people exposed to similar social and economic conditions, who are incumbents in similar roles, and who come from similar situational contexts. There can be little… sociological interest in randomly distributed problems …. or randomly distributed responses to these problems. Such random…stress is of legitimate interest to clinicians or biologists, but not to sociologists. Therefore a salient feature of sociological stress research is its concern with the socially patterned distribution of the stress process: stressors, mediators, and outcomes.” (1989: 242).

This, to me, together with Carol Aneshensel’s 1991 piece working at the other end of the process, was the basic manifesto of sociological study of stress.

**A Generalized Test of the Stress Process in a National Population:** Last summer, I presented a paper at the stress conference that posed the issue of studying the entire stress process, rather than in pieces. Of course, there are rare opportunities to do this, because of data, but Jay Turner and I had put the basic stress process measures in the National Population Health Survey in Canada in 1994, and there is now up to 10 waves of different kinds of stress, mastery, social support, self-esteem, etc., as well as multiple outcome measures, and of course the usual sociological starting points.

It is ironic to me that this was done just a few months before Len died, because it was intended to be something that he would notice and take pleasure in. I did a longitudinal fixed effects analysis, also
never done before, and used both mental and physical health outcomes. It is sad this paper did not get to publication before he died, but it is the number one thing on my list that should be published soon.

One thing this paper points to, that goes back to the spirit of the original Stress Process, is the idea that you can’t leave out pieces of the model without the risk of misleading findings. Studying social support alone begs the issue of its role relative to mastery, studying life events alone misses whether they are proliferated stressors after a stressful childhood, or whether they have an effect because of proliferated chronic stress, or studying depression may pinpoint specific risk groups that would be equalized if anger or conduct problems are added. I made the point that this is all the same point: we are all at the mercy of the more complete specification of the model.

The presentation traced the decade changes Len put into the stress process. After the 1989 quote above (the manifesto I called it), Len got more specific about the status origins in the 1999 piece:

As shown by the figure, the social and economic statuses of people are superimposed on the stress process. It is these characteristics that make the model and the orientation to stress research it embodies quintessentially sociological. These characteristics signal the linkages between the status placement of people in the larger systems of society and their health and well-being... the statuses of people are potentially connected to virtually every component of the stress process. (1999: 397-398)

I made the point that the stress process naturally exists at 30,000 feet – that is part of its value. Specific explanations of specific status effects may work, but they fail to see commonalities as well. This is part of my long-term aversion to case by case explanations, which are theoretical, but constantly promote the uniqueness of everything. Everything is not unique. There are general health risk processes that surface across disadvantaged statuses. My talk had not yet included how the statuses combine -- intersectionality – and it is the next thing to do in this paper.

The paper will be dedicated to Len.

In the Air (The Life Course): A good deal of the history of Len’s work involves ideas in the air, that multiple people articulate as a kind of spontaneous chorus. This happened with chronic stress, with mastery cum instrumentalism cum sense of control, with the expansion of time in lives and the incorporation of the life course, with the multi-layering of stressors. Len managed to always be there at the right moment in all of this --- he just seemed to stick his finger in the wind before anyone else, and see where it was going to blow tomorrow.

I took particular encouragement from my conversation with Len about the life course, because I was interested in childhood stress, like thousands of others. But seen through the lens of the life course, you see the natural unfolding of early stressors. The theoretical linkages become understandable, without the ridiculous baggage of psychodynamics. Like Bill Avison, I was very influenced by Michael Rutter’s brilliant piece on pathways from childhood to adult life. It was the contingencies in the life course that impressed me in that piece.

I remember a long conversation with Len about this, and his view of the affinity of two related but different paradigms. Like many CRISP meetings, one always returned to one’s own work with both renewed energy and focus, but also a somewhat different pathway.

Festschrift, Visits, and Timing: I am very glad I did the paper I did for the Festschrift on the survival of the stress process paradigm. Len was pleased with it. And this is important: we are all glad the Festschrift happened and was that successful.
It seems as if the timing issue raised so often in the life course literature has worked for Len in a number of ways at a number of different points: 1) the propitious historical moment at which the stress process was published -- after a decade of 24/7 life events, and a predominant focus on social support only; 2) Editing JHSB around the time that the field was changing in the new directions that co-occurred around 1980; 3) CRISP as planting seeds for elaborating the stress process; 4) The Festschrift in time to be seriously appreciated; and 5) Scott and I visiting just weeks before his death --- one of the best decisions I have ever made. In the life course literature, I favor timing over duration, or order, and there is evidence of its importance in Len’s career. There are probably a number of examples others could offer of this.

**Turns to Gold:** To a certain extent, Len had the touch – whatever he did, it worked for his legacy. There is nothing one can see that did not turn into work that was well-timed and well-received. Len developed good relations with colleagues throughout his life. That is part of the reason things turned to gold along the way so easily. Looking back now, a very high proportion of Len’s publications had impact, were useful and used, and changed others’ work. There was little that was ignored.

**Taste:** Taste is part of the issue in judging a life of work. Len had good taste, because he liked ideas, and supported new ideas that went beyond. To be clear: this is pretty unique. I am impressed at how many people are basically resistant, even grumpy, about new ideas, are threatened by them, try to suppress them. Len was somewhat the opposite – he could recognize a rehashed idea a mile away, and tended to steer clear.

Len disliked simple questions with simple answers. He was no a big fan of epidemiological or psychological approaches in part because they were so heavily templated – overly focused. In a sense, Len was the camp leader in keeping the sociological perspective at the highest level of priority.

Len could be hard on people – but I never knew him, once, to be hard on someone unjustifiably. He was fair, but he had his tastes and his limits.

**Breakfast by the Sea:** The last time I saw Len, I have two specific memories. One was the breakfast in the public dining area of his residence. He knew everyone, of course. What struck me though was how fine he was, how much he glowed and seemed so at ease, and enjoying the moment. Gerrie let him go that day, even though he was that frail. But his bravery at hiding the truth underneath was obvious too.

Scott and I took him down to the seashore to sit on a bench. The one block walk was almost too much. Scott was very worried. The three of us sat on a bench at the beach, in the fresh warm breeze, with runners and walkers and swimmers and volleyball players going by, and talked about practically nothing at all. Completely trivial stuff. And yet, everyone there, the three generations of us, could sense it was magical. It was a moment with a lasting picture burned into my memory cells, as I watched Len laugh and talk about anything he wanted. Time seemed slow, and could have been slower. We all hugged, and then left...
Linda K. George, Duke University

I had the privilege of knowing Len Pearlin for 42 years. I first met him when I was a graduate student who revered his scholarship. Meeting Len was a great moment for me – he was kind and thoughtful in our interaction, acting as if our conversation was important to him. Even then I realized that the attention he paid to me wasn’t about me, but rather about him. That is, I recognized that his graciousness and generosity reflected his innate kindness and benevolence. At that time, I had no idea that he would be an important influence, close colleague, and dear friend for more than four decades. I was just thrilled to have met him and had a few minutes of his time and attention.

The ability of scholars to transform reading each other’s work and meeting at professional conferences into close and meaningful collegial relationships is really quite remarkable. This was the norm even before the advent of email. And this is the process by which I came to know Len. If one added up the total amount of one-on-one conversations that Len and I had over the years, they probably wouldn’t have totaled more than the proverbial 40-hour work week. I can’t imagine feeling that I came to know someone well after working with that person for a week. And yet I feel that my relationship with Len was close and meaningful. This is true in part because I experienced more than our one-on-one interactions. I heard him speak many times. He occasionally included personal anecdotes in his professional talks, but more importantly he projected his personality and character into his presentations. I also had the privilege of attending numerous social functions such as receptions and dinners at which Len also was present. An impressive amount of personal information and opinions is shared in those informal settings. Despite the fact that I would not speak to Len for months at a time, we shared the important parts of our lives as well as our careers and he was a true friend.

Perhaps what I treasure most about Len’s impressive contributions to research on stress and its consequences was his mastery of the written word. I told Len several years ago that he is the only scholar for whom, when I read his work, I invariably say “I wish I’d written that.” I’ve had the same reaction to specific papers written by many sociologists investigating mental health. But Len is the one colleague for whom that is my reaction to absolutely everything he wrote. I know of no other scholar who conveyed so much of the human suffering that results from social stressors anchored in unjust structural arrangements and so much of the dogged determination that allows humans to get by – and occasionally flourish – despite tough times and social disadvantage. Len was a pioneering scholar. Even more important, he was a remarkable human being.

Shirley J. Semple,
University of California, San Diego

In September 1985, I entered the doctoral program in Human Development and Aging at the University of California, San Francisco, and spent the next five years as Len Pearlin’s student and research assistant. I was eager to participate in this tribute to Dr. Pearlin because my individual experience demonstrates how his impact in the field of stress and mental health extends far beyond the field of sociology. I am not a sociologist, although…
Len would say otherwise. I have spent the past 25 years in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego. My work has focused on behavioral interventions in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention. However, my research career began with Len Pearlin at UCSF where I learned the ins and outs of conducting a large-scale, longitudinal research project. From him, I learned every aspect of the research process, from grant writing to developing measures and questionnaires, recruiting participants, collecting and managing data, planning data analyses, and developing manuscripts. Len was a true leader and one that worked alongside his research team. Every day, he would work tirelessly through all of the challenges that we faced. It was a privilege to watch him in action -- conceptualizing, problem-solving, evaluating, interpreting -- all in his trademark eloquent manner. He had a superior command of the English language and a vocabulary that, in graduate school, kept me running for the dictionary. He wrote as beautifully as he spoke, with Mediterranean flair. As a teacher, he was brilliant and inspirational. He had a gift for motivating and empowering his students. Throughout my career, he continued to give generously of his time and superior knowledge.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Len Pearlin for my current career. He jump-started my career by bringing me to a meeting at the University of California, San Diego where he introduced me to people who would go on to become my colleagues for 25 years. At UCSD, I worked on an Alzheimer’s caregiver project that adopted Len’s concepts and measures, published in The Gerontologist in 1990. Len’s involvement in that project paved the way for it to continue on and today it remains a funded project 25 years later. Len’s contribution to the understanding of Alzheimer’s caregiver stress is unprecedented. His caregiving measures have been translated into many languages and used around the globe, including a study of caregivers in Shanghai, China on which I collaborated. In my 25 years working with doctoral and post-doctoral students at UCSD, I have taken great pleasure in introducing them to Len Pearlin’s work, particularly the stress process. Many of my students have used the stress process model to examine stress, coping and mental health outcomes in HIV prevention research. Our research team has also used his measures of coping and social support with high-risk populations in international settings, including drug users and female sex workers in Mexico and India.

I am truly honored to have been Len Pearlin’s student, and just plain lucky to have 30 years of cherished memories of a truly warm, generous, caring, and good-natured person with a terrific sense of humor. As I share memories of Len with former UCSF students and other colleagues, it is apparent that his passing was felt deeply by all who knew him. I will end this tribute with one of my favorite stories of Len from my graduate school days. Following a meeting about my dissertation, I asked Len (not for the first time) for a copy of his 1981 seminal publication “The stress process”. He pulled a reprint from a stack of papers, handed it to me with a smile, and said “I hope you’re not wallpapering your bathroom with these things”. If Len were here today, I would tell him that there is no wallpaper in my house, only yellowed, marked up reprints that are personal treasures.
The sociological study of stressors can reveal the connections between social organization and the organization of lives. To find these connections, however, we cannot treat stress as stemming from unconnected happenings. Instead, the antecedents of stress need to be understood in terms of process, whereby broad structural and institutional forces, constellations of primary and secondary stressors, and widely shared values converge over time to affect people’s well-being (Pearlin 1989: 249).

Elizabeth G. Menaghan, The Ohio State University

Len’s work helped many in the field to take seriously the likelihood that a simple additive model of the effects of resources and stressors on outcomes would prove insufficient for our understanding of the stress process. First, his work emphasized possible stress accumulation processes, where the effects of difficult circumstances in one area of life, such as employment, may exacerbate the impact of stressors in another area, such as family. For example, in studying work and family roles and psychological well-being, the impact of unemployment was more severe for married fathers and unmarried mothers (Menaghan, 1989).

Second, he called attention to possible stress-buffering effects. Being in a supportive marriage, for example, might cushion the impact of work strains, and conversely a satisfying job could lessen the adverse impacts of lone parenting. Within any given role, stressors’ impacts are also likely to vary depending on the level of social-psychological resources individuals can bring to bear in managing them. Conversely, the protective effects of some resources may only be apparent when stressors mount. For example, job disruption had harsher consequences for those with low self-esteem and a more limited sense of mastery in their lives (Pearlin et al., 1981). Similarly, the benefits of a mother’s higher cognitive skills in reducing their children’s behavior problems were particularly strong when a child’s father was absent from the household (Cooksey, Menaghan, and Jekielek, 1997). These are just a few examples of the many studies that have more fully explored contingencies among stressors within an individual’s life, among stressors across couples, and between stressors and resources.

Over the course of a long career, Len Pearlin made more than intellectual contributions to the study of stress. At least as important, he invested much love and care in nurturing generations of younger scholars, connecting them to one another, and encouraging them in turn to nurture younger scholars. I feel very fortunate to have benefited from his kindness and care, and to have contributed to the web of scholarship that he stimulated.

David Mechanic, Rutgers University

Len was the pre-eminent theorist and researcher on stress and coping ... and had a magnificent influence not only on stress research in sociology but across a number of related disciplines. Len was a major contributor to our field in so many ways, extremely loyal and dedicated to the discipline and deserving of any accolades we can give him.
For many of us who study the sociology of mental health, aging, or social psychological processes, Len will likely be known and remembered foremost for his enduring contributions to the field, writ large, particularly for his work on the stress process, the concept of mastery, and his studies on caregiving. But for those of us who were his students and colleagues, his mentorship loomed equally large. As important as his scholarship was his human spirit, and at the very micro, individual level, Len had a lasting impact on those he so generously mentored.

As some of his last students, we knew Len during a period of time when he was easing out of his professional career. Between 2000 and 2008 at the University of Maryland, Len was conducting and concluding his research on the relationships between aging, stress, and health among older adults. At varying and overlapping points, each of us served as graduate students on his project, and we came to know him through this study as well as through his class on the sociology of mental health and his counsel on our dissertation committees.

Len presided over these various capacities with infinite graciousness and patience. What made him remarkable to us, even exceptional, as a mentor was his investment in both our intellectual and emotional lives. Broad- and fair-minded, Len encouraged us to explore interests that captured and motivated our attention, whether or not they aligned with his own. Of greater significance was that our work met his high standards, and he gently, but firmly, held us to account. He pushed us to rigorous inquiry and accepted nothing less than conceptual and methodological clarity. In the process, Len became an integral part of our self-fashioning as scholars, helping us to map out and give coherence to our intellectual homes.

Importantly, Len was also deeply committed to the task of sociological inquiry as an enterprise to be undertaken in partnership, whether it meant an alliance with other paradigms such as the life course perspective or other individuals engaged in scholarly production. The latter meant working not only with seasoned scholars in the field but also with still green students struggling to find their place. No matter one’s status, Len was invariably intent on opening the field to new people, and by extension, new ideas – even if they challenged his own perspective. Throughout his career, anyone who approached him could be reliably greeted with warmth, good humor, and a complete absence of pretension.

In graduate school, where time is often impressed upon students as urgent, frenzied, and scarce, Len never failed to time to meet with us and lend his full attention. He maintained a regular and exacting schedule for himself but held an open door policy to engage with others. A knock on the door was never turned away and no conversation was ever hurried or viewed as an intrusion. He made us feel as if time were suspended and that we could speak at length on any matter, sociological or otherwise. We often looked to those drop ins or the countless lunches he took us out to as opportunities to hear his firsthand accounts of how the field had evolved and the many personalities that dotted and shaped the
landscape, as well as how his experiences bore on his own trajectory. He, in turn, often asked us not just about our academic progress, but our own life events and transitions and what we envisioned for the future, both personal and professional. Len was not removed as a mentor but invited us into his home and into his life.

It is not surprising that one of Len’s research areas was the relationship between caregiving and health because, in practice, he simply, and steadfastly, took care of us – intellectually, emotionally, and physically. He ensured that what was human was not lost in the experience of graduate school life, which could often feel impersonal and isolating. Instead, he afforded us a safe space to grow and thrive, providing shelter from the sometimes grueling pace and financial vagaries of graduate studies. Few people were as consistent a presence in our academic lives as Len and there was no single person who was as fiercely determined to see us succeed and who was such an ardent champion of our successes. For those who were not fortunate to know Len, his essence is in plain view in his writing. Always a beautiful and elegant writer, he also articulated and encapsulated aspects of the human experience with an abiding compassion. Unyielding hardships such as grinding financial strain were not merely abstract concepts to be measured, but lived experiences to respect and appreciate in their rich complexity, very much reflecting the way he approached the world and this warmth in life was effortlessly evoked on the printed page. And while one can immediately recognize the eloquence of Len’s writing, one cannot appreciate its expanse in full until one sits down and feebly attempts to describe the perspective he set forth. Because Len wrote with not only beauty but unerring precision, we are often left to only poorly paraphrase his ideas or resort to quoting him verbatim. While we could never hope to write with equal brilliance, Len’s words inspired us to continually strive for sharper focus, tighter argumentation, and a more thorough accounting of social life.

In his last years at Maryland, Len’s vigor and enthusiasm for sociological inquiry remained undiminished and were readily evident in his continued productivity during that time. Yet for all of his lifelong successes, in Len’s characteristic humble fashion, it was he who always made us feel cherished and vital. When we were his students, Len made us feel cared for, and when we parted, he ensured that we were on firm footing in our lives and helped us take our place in our professions. Through his example, we learned how to be good mentors and colleagues ourselves. We have been and continue to be beneficiaries of Len’s uncommon grace and generosity. For all these things, we are deeply grateful and privileged to have been his students. He is beloved and missed tremendously.

Jane D. McLeod, Indiana University

The current strength and vibrancy of the sociology of mental health is attributable, in large part, to Len Pearlin’s foundational scholarly contributions. More than any other articles, his 1981 analysis (with Menaghan, Lieberman, and Mullan) of the stress process and his 1989 commentary on sociological research on stress reverberate through contemporary scholarship, with 3,996 and 1,841 citations by Google Scholar’s count, respectively.
Three features of Len’s work have been especially transformative. First, in his 1989 commentary, Len reminded sociologists of our special responsibility to analyze the structural origins of stressful experiences and their moderators. He defined structure broadly to encompass macro-structures, such as stratification hierarchies and the economy, as well as more local structures, such as neighborhoods and role relations. His commentary secured sociologists a central place in the interdisciplinary field of stress research. Even scholars in other fields whose analytic priorities lie elsewhere (e.g., Shelley Taylor) have adopted multi-level models of stress that situate stressors within social contexts.

Second, Len affirmed the centrality of social psychology to the sociological study of stress by highlighting the “broad array of social psychological conditions that combine over time to create stress” (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, and Mullan 1981, p. 337). Stressors’ effects on physical and mental health are not inevitable; rather, those effects depend on interpersonal and role relations that convey, heighten, or soften their impacts and on the responses of the self. As Len’s work on caregiving (with Aneshensel and others) demonstrated so effectively, the richest analyses of the stress process incorporate strong theory and evidence from sociological social psychology.

Finally, and related, most overtly in his 1981 article on the stress process but evident in all of his empirical work, Len encouraged careful thinking about the causal processes through which stressful experiences affect physical and mental health. It is not enough to know whether traumatic life events, chronic strains, and other stressful experiences damage health, we have to know how and why.

Len’s emphases on structure, social psychology, and process encouraged my own engagement with questions of the “how and why,” whether applied to understanding the effects of living in poverty on children’s mental health, health disparities, or the implications of children’s emotional and behavioral problems for social attainments. In that sense, Len’s analytic approach extends far beyond work on the stress process (as if that were not enough!) into allied areas in the sociology of mental health, medical sociology, and gerontology. Through his writings and by example, he inspired me and many others to deepen our analyses by embracing the full range of relevant sociological concepts and approaches.

As important as Len’s scholarly contributions are to the field, I value equally his role in nurturing a welcoming community among sociologists of mental health. In the early stages of my career, mid-career and senior scholars regularly shared meals at conferences. They brought their students along and we eagerly, if somewhat shyly, accepted a place at the table. The warmth and conviviality of those gatherings cemented my identity as a sociologist of mental health. Even as I have become involved in...
other sections and other intellectual ventures, this community remains my first and most cherished intellectual home, as for so many others.

**Ronald C. Kessler, Harvard University**

I’m sure lots of people will be writing about Len’s effect on the field. I will leave that to them and will instead comment on Len’s effect on my own work. That effect was enormous. At the time I started my career, Len’s landmark paper with Carmi Schooler, The Structure of Coping, had just been published (1978). The conceptual model laid out in that paper became the roadmap for much of the work that I carried out over the next decade. I was not alone in this respect, as just about everyone in my generation who worked in the sociology of mental illness was influenced in a fundamental way by Len’s work. We differed in whether we focused on particular acute stressors (job loss being one of particular interest at the time because of the economic downturn), on the effects of particular stress buffers (social support being the one that attracted most interested at that time), or on the complex ways in which the associations of social roles with mental disorders were influenced by selection processes, role-related stresses, and stress buffers associated with role incumbency. Len Pearlin’s ideas about the stress process were foundational to all these kinds of work. But more than that, Len was a mentor to many of us who worked in the sociology of mental illness. He made us believe in the importance of the area. He motivated us to carry out research to expand the area. And he facilitated that work by making critical suggestions about ideas, providing thoughtful comments on draft manuscripts, and giving encouragement at critical moments in the research process. My interactions with Len and the colleagues he attracted around him each year at the ASA meetings energized and sustained me for the next 12 months until we could do it all over again. What an extraordinary man and what wonderful memories.

**Allen J. LeBlanc, San Francisco State University**

It is a vast understatement to say that Leonard Pearlin changed my life for the better. This is true in too many ways to count. The professional mentorship that he generously and kindly offered to me over many years shapes my work life every day. In the mid 1990s, when Len moved back to the east coast to continue developing and expanding his by-then classic studies of stress and health in the context of informal caregiving, I was the fortunate one asked to join him and help to manage his projects at the University of Maryland. It was during this time that I first began to look for ways to apply stress process frameworks to the study of sexual minority health. In typical Len fashion, he gave me time and resources to pursue my ideas. More importantly, he listened, he advised, and he encouraged me to think rigorously and creatively.

With qualitative pilot data from gay men over 50 living in the DC area, I was able to begin building a sense of how critical life course events and transitions relating to their sexual identities had shaped their familial, professional, social, and intimate relationships. This work led me to my first attempts to secure external funding to delve deeper into the ways in which stress and health are uniquely associated with identity, roles, and relationships among sexual minority populations. My early attempts to do this all failed, but when the right historical moment arrived – with unprecedented social changes regarding the civil rights of sexual minority persons – I was hopeful that I would find an opportunity to work collaboratively to expand the application of stress process theory by extending its focus more explicitly to relational stressors, as well as to stressors that are unique experienced by sexual minority populations. The latter felt especially promising as a potential tool for better understanding health disparities based on sexual identity or orientation.
As we prepared a large-scale research proposal to the National Institutes of Health to conduct an in-depth study of social stress and mental health among same-sex couples, Len’s advice and encouragement bolstered my hopes, and when I was able to share with him the news that the work would receive funding, he delighted in our good fortune. The full articulation of our attempts to clearly integrate essential elements from stress process and minority stress frameworks has now been detailed in the Journal of Marriage and Family (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015, in press). This article will always be special to me as Len continued to graciously offer his feedback and share his enthusiasm for the work during the final months of his life. As he had always been, he was eager to help so many of us build on the strong and sturdy foundation of his remarkable career’s work. There are so many times when one is reminded in reading Len’s writing – often in his elegant phrasing that seems to magically, effortlessly reveal deeper truths – how clear his vision was for conducting scholarship that informs theoretical thinking and uncovers important lessons that matter in real life.

Len’s personal mentorship has been equally important to me. In addition to his intellectual contributions, he gave us his example of how to be generous and generative, further distinguishing his contributions to the field and future generations of scholars. The way he lived his life, navigating its ups and downs with grace and compassion – and a beautiful sense of mastery – are with me always.

**Carmi Schooler, University of Maryland**

From the mid to the late nineteen sixties the Laboratory of Socio-Environmental Studies in the Intramural Research Program of the National Institute of Mental Health was a pretty amazing place to work, especially for sociologists. Among the sociologists working there, often in different pairings, were Mel Kohn-the then Laboratory Chief- Manny Rosenberg, Len and me (a card-carrying psychologist as well as a sociologist).

The Lab members differed in how they chose to spend their lunch times, e.g., at their desks, eating together in the cafeteria, running errands, or sometimes playing some sport at the local Jewish Community Center. I played handball and squash; Len favored handball. It was on one of these trips to play handball together at the Center that Len mentioned that, although he was pretty sure what the coping data that he had collected “said”, he couldn’t figure out a statistically appropriate way to test and present the findings. That led to our collaboration on the paper we published in 1978 (Pearlin and Schooler). My contribution was to help in applying the best available and generally accepted statistical approaches at the time. Working with Len’s endorsement, we were able to extract what the data had to say about coping. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that more modern techniques would give us essentially the same results.

Many decades have passed since the data written about above were collected, analyzed and papers written about the outcomes. During the ensuing years great strides in both empirical findings and theoretical understanding, have been made by Len, his collaborators and now successors. I, having somewhat different interests, have contributed almost nothing to these advances. But, I continue to follow the literature. Thus, I can vouch for how impressive the interlocked set of theoretical and empirical approaches to coping started by Len, and now being carried forward by his intellectual inheritors, has turned out to be.
Scott Schieman, University of Toronto

In the final sentences of his 1983 chapter “Role Strains and Personal Stress,” Leonard Pearlin wrote: “It is my intention...to bring the study of stress closer to the study of ordinary lives. To understand how stress comes about, we do not always have to reach out to the exotic, rare, or eventful. We need only to take a careful look at the structure of everyday experience in the pursuit of everyday life” (p. 30).

Those words, and that chapter more generally, have been among the most influential and inspiration elements of my own research and development as a scholar. I suspect that when many of us reflect on Len’s contribution to the field, one of the main ideas that come to mind somehow connect to his concern with the quality of social roles.

From 2000 to 2004, I was fortunate enough to have been by Len’s side at the University of Maryland as we worked on one of his major grant initiatives (“Aging, Stress and Health” study). I left a tenure track position at the University of Miami to become a Research Scientist and collaborator on Len’s project. Some warned that I was “crazy to leave the tenure track.” I didn't know Len personally at the time, but as a graduate student who focused on stress and mental health, well…you can imagine my sense of excitement at the opportunity to work with and learn from the Yoda of the sociological study of stress.

During my years at Maryland, Len would regularly drive me from campus to the Friendship Heights Metro stop near his home, and I would continue my journey to my apartment in downtown DC. Our conversations were rich with his reflections and knowledge about sociology (and life). I could write a book about the lessons on those “Rides with Len.” One of the most important was his selfless mentorship and generosity with ideas. He set the standard, modeling authentic scholarship and awareness of the unresolved puzzles of social life. Indeed, one of those journeys to Friendship Heights inspired the motivation for my first grant—specifically, Len’s articulation of interpersonal conflict in role-set, which he situated in a sociological tradition that traced back to his links to Robert Merton and others.

Over the years, I have revisited Len’s 1983 chapter many times... and each time I take away something new. He provided a clever social anatomy of role stress: “role ambiguity,” “role restructuring,” “interpersonal conflict in the role-set,” and one of my favorites: “role captivity.” Role captivity! Like many of his ideas, this one provides avenues for discovery; we still know little about it.

I encourage you to give that 1983 chapter another look (and then another). It is fertile terrain for a great dissertation or a new piece in Society and Mental Health.

Len convinced sociologists who study stress and health to focus on “ordinary lives.” As our collective reflections about his contribution reveal, his life was anything but ordinary.
In 1981 Pearlin and his colleagues introduced the concept of economic strain to the study of social causes of psychological well-being and distress. At the time the major theoretical explanation for social differences in mental health was that life change events were stressful and distressing. According to the theory, any change--good or bad--required readjustment, and was therefore a detriment to well-being. Life change theory could not and did not attempt to explain social inequalities in mental health. Change happens equally to the poorly educated and well educated; to those with high and low incomes; to the employed and unemployed. Because life events theory claimed (incorrectly) that positive change was as bad for well-being as was negative change, and because it was negative change, not positive, that characterized the lives of the disadvantaged, the theory of life change events discounted social inequality as a cause of well-being. Change per se cannot explain the social patterns of psychological distress because it is not linked to social position or to distress. Pearlin and his colleagues redirected attention to the undesirable events, losses, failures, and the resulting ongoing stressors that flow from inequality, stratification, and lack of opportunity. It was exactly this social inequality in subjective well-being that Pearlin and his colleagues sought to describe and explain. Their groundbreaking paradigm introduced economic strain as a major link between job and income losses and psychological distress.

Economic strain is a chronic stressor. Getting fired, laid off, or demoted, and the resulting lowered income is distressing because of the resulting economic hardship. People facing economic strain have trouble paying their bills and paying for necessities like food, shelter, and clothing. The struggle to pay the bills and to feed and clothe the family takes its toll in depression and anxiety. It is not that lack of money prevents people from buying medical treatments or drugs that improve well-being. It is that lack of money creates the ongoing strain of trying to pay the bills, the rent, and other basic necessities. Depression often results from this seemingly endless and hopeless struggle.
Whatever its future tasks may be, research into the stress process over the past several decades has led to a considerable forward movement. Yet, it remains a work in progress, for each step forward raises new questions and challenges. However, the work that lies ahead should not obscure a core message that can be drawn from what has already been learned from the sociology of mental health and its stress process framework; namely, when we look at the etiology of mental health, we are able to see a convincing example of how personal problems may often have their beginnings in social problems. We can assert that what has been learned and what will be learned in the future will continue to go directly against the grain of such a claim. Personal problems can be and often are reflections of structures and contexts in which people lead their lives (Pearlin and Bierman 2012:338).

**Allan V. Horwitz, Rutgers University**

Len Pearlin uniquely established a new paradigm that unified an entire field of sociology, grounded the area within core theoretical concerns in the discipline, and provided a distinctively sociological approach in an area – mental health – that most people intuitively regard as a property of individuals. His model of the stress process has dominated research in the sociology of mental health for the past thirty-five years and shows no signs of losing its overwhelming influence in the area.

Len’s initial work emerged during his time at the National Institute of Mental Health, a period (in thorough contrast to the present) when this agency was fundamentally concerned with the psychosocial determinants of mental health. It reflected the approach of the Laboratory of Socioenvironmental Studies in the Intramural Program at the NIMH, the home at various periods of such other notable sociologists as Erving Goffman, John Clausen, Melvin Kohn, Morris Rosenberg, and Carmi Schooler. Before Len began his pathbreaking work, sociological research about the social origins of mental health focused on how isolated life events influenced positive and negative states of mind. Len’s singular achievement was to show how the most important social determinants of mental health are interconnected, grounded in macro-institutional systems of stratification, social attachments, and cultural systems of meaning, and modified by socially-determined resources of coping and social support that can mitigate or exaggerate the mental health impacts of stressors.

Len insisted that distress arose from social structures that often do not provide meaningful jobs, decent livings, or equitable social arrangements. This sociological perspective that individual problems reflect social conditions and the absence of social support fundamentally contrasts with the dominant current model of the mental health professions and NIMH that reduce social problems to individual pathologies, which should be treated with medication or therapy. Len taught sociologists of stress to avoid the inappropriate medicalization of the psychological consequences of the stress process and focus on how altering inequitable social structures provide the optimal approach to improving mental health in populations.

Len’s thoroughly structural view allowed sociologists such as me who wanted to study mental health and illness but who were not concerned with psychological factors an eye-
opening lens for how to resist psychologizing a process that seemed so inherently psychological. Yet, Len had perhaps his greatest influence on my own work in his view that undesirable states of mental health were not mental disorders but, instead, the normal results of stressful social arrangements. Distress that resulted from social structural causes and mental disorder were not different points on the same continuum where distress is a less serious version of disorder. Although both distress and mental disorder might be viewed as continuous, they are different continua: one emerges because non-disordered people confront stressful environments, the other because of some dysfunction in the individual.

For someone who was responsible for such paradigm-altering work, Len was a remarkably modest individual. He was also, as we all know, remarkably giving to other sociologists of stress, especially the most junior among us. Len is irreplaceable, not just for his towering intellectual achievements, but also for his personal integrity and kindness. He will be missed.

Robin W. Simon, Wake Forest University

Leonard Pearlin’s work was my initial introduction to the sociology of mental health. As an undergraduate student in a graduate course with Alice Rossi on the sociology of parenthood, I was profoundly moved by his 1977 article on Marital Status, Life Strains and Depression in the American Sociological Review. At the time, I was unaware that the ASR was a flagship sociology journal and that he was a giant in the field of stress and mental health. I also did not know exactly why this particular article struck a chord; was it the eloquent writing or piercing insight into the connection between individuals’ social locations and their emotional well-being? For a budding sociologist, the article represented a substantive application of the ideas of another sociologist whose work I read in an undergraduate sociological theory course – C. Wright Mills, who wrote about the link between broad structural arrangements and deeply personal problems.

I continued reading Len’s articles for term papers and an Honors Thesis on the topics of marriage, parenthood, and emotional well-being. Although I was already seriously considering an academic career in sociology before I stumbled on his articles, Len’s work solidified my decision to attend graduate school. At Indiana University, I wrote a dissertation on gender, multiple roles, and mental health under the direction of Peggy Thoits. In graduate school, Len’s scholarship continued to resonate with me. When I was writing my very first article that was eventually published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, I had the 1977 ASR article in hand and tried to emulate the logic of his argument as well as its cadence and tone.

Although he seemed humored by it, I do not think that Len actually believed me when I told him (each and every year at the ASA meetings) that he was partially responsible for my decision to become a sociologist. When I recounted my personal narrative, he simply smiled. Perhaps he thought that I was just being kind to a senior scholar in the field. I did, however, feel certain that Len was supportive and encouraging, which carried tremendous psychological weight as I continued developing my career. I would later learn that he cared deeply about and supported all of his colleagues and felt honored when Len, Gerrie, and I became friends.

Whether he was writing about the structure of coping, social structure and processes of social support, or stress over the life course, Len was a master at poignantly articulating the ways in which macro-level social inequalities have micro-level consequences by getting under our skin and into our minds and hearts. Although others have greatly influenced my scholarship over the years, no one has had a greater
impact on my thinking about the nexus between social structure and subjectively experienced feelings than Leonard Pearlin who I admired and loved. I am indebted to my dear colleague and friend not only for introducing me to the sociology of mental health but for being a major source of inspiration throughout my scholarly career.

R. Jay Turner, Vanderbilt University
I absolutely loved Leonard Pearlin. I loved his grace, his kindness, his support and the obvious pleasure he seemed to experience when others achieved or did something particularly well. His capacity to be warmly expectant of younger scholars in our field and to provide guidance without condescension set him apart from all others I have known in my 50 years of work on the Sociology of mental health. To simply say I miss him is incomplete and unsatisfying. This is so because I know that I will always miss him because there is no substitute for this socioemotional leader who, more than anyone, advanced our field and stimulated its’ development. Indeed, I have come to recognize that much of my own work, and that of a number of other recognized scholars, can be appropriately viewed as a series of footnotes to Len Pearlin’s substantive contributions. Among his many admonitions that have become agglutinated to my own soul is that social stress, as well as social and personal resources, arise out of the context of people’s lives and that social statuses matter for mental health largely because one’s constellation of statuses substantially define systematic contextual differences. I owe a great deal to Len and I am grateful to him for being the link that brought me together with so many other colleagues who have greatly enriched my personal and professional life. Finally, it must be noted that the loss of Len has certainly diminished the field’s reservoir of wisdom. I hope we can somehow compensate for this loss and for the many other losses.

William Avison
The University of Western Ontario
The truth is that we were all students of Len Pearlin, regardless of our experience or professorial rank. Every time I talked with Len, I learned something, I thought differently about stress and mental health, or I understood more about the complexity of social life.

I first met Len at the ASA Meetings in Washington, DC, in 1985. Len was so generous with his time and his ideas that I felt energized about research in the sociology of mental health. Over the next 30 years, I met with Len at various conferences and later, in Washington, every time that I came in to do NIH reviews. Len and Gerrie became good friends whom I looked forward to seeing.

Throughout the years, we met at ASA meetings and often took in a baseball game together. And of course, there were the Stress Conferences in Durham,
Budapest, Paris, Honolulu, and the legendary stress and boating conference in London!

Len was one of the most generous scholars whom I have known. He invited me to workshops that he had organized. He was always willing to share ideas and make suggestions for improving one’s work. There were many times where I received invitations to participate in book projects and conferences as a result of Len’s advocacy. His mentorship and support made me a better sociologist.

Len invited me to co-author a chapter that he and Elena Fazio were writing for a book that I was editing with Jane McLeod and Bernice Pescosolido. I leapt at the opportunity! Len’s panoramic view of the sociology of mental health and its relationship with psychiatry was impressive. He had thought through the historical development of the field and summarized it in his typically articulate writing style. He could see the way forward in our field with amazing clarity. Working with Len was a highlight of my career.

In 2008, Carol Aneshensel, Scott Schieman, Blair Wheaton and I organized a festschrift for Len that brought as much joy to us as it did to Len. For all of us, it was a way of saying thank you to our mentor, colleague and friend.

My memories of Len are fond. He enriched my life; he was a great friend.

Carol S. Aneshensel
University of California Los Angeles

Our collaboration spanning more than two decades was a thrilling adventure of discovery and creation fueled by the intellectual stimulation that comes from mutual give and take. The earliest advice I received from Len was to stop hugging the data as if it were a lifesaver, to apply statistical technique in the service of an idea—not as a substitute for one, and to use each particular study to inform the principal theoretical issues confronting the field—transformative advice for a number cruncher that permanently altered how I approached my research. Len rewrote the first sentences of every paper I asked him to review, mostly because he enjoyed writing first sentences and excelled at it. The entire paper invariably needed to be rewritten then to the standard of the first sentence. He fiddled with titles too and never tired of telling me he didn’t like my choice for our book “Profiles in Caregiving: The Unexpected Career”. Len’s grammatical tutoring reached a critical point while we were correcting the page proofs for it. Although he was frustrated (quite possibly annoyed) with repeatedly substituting “which” for “that” and “that” for “which”, words I had used randomly, it was having to insert “although” for “while” dozens of times that prompted an exasperated Len to pen the following mnemonon that still sits on my desk: “Whereas I studied the editing, and although I am a slow learner, I did catch on after a while.” Understandably, I took great pleasure in pointing out to Len every grammatical error I found in his publications—a total of four. I have stumbled on these gems because I reread Len’s papers, discovering something meaningful with each reading. Now I read these papers to hear Len’s voice again.
Yet it is of considerable importance to study social structures and their effects on individual well-being.

If sociologists don’t do this and do it well, who will?

(Pearlin 1989: 255)

Julie McDonald, Bill Avison, Gerrie, Len, Carol Aneshensel, and Gay Meixel
Paris, 1996