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# Sam Schuman Award: A Letter to Sam with Many Thanks

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## Sam Schuman Award: A Letter to Sam with Many Thanks

JOHN ZUBIZARRETA  
Columbia College

Dear Sam,

Letters are almost becoming an extinct form of sharing meaningful ideas or authentic emotions in the wake of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter, but I'm old-fashioned, like you an unabashed lover of Shakespeare and the wonder of well-chosen words, and somehow what I want to say about the rare privilege of receiving the 2018 NCHC award in your name demands more than a tweet or other impermanent post. I write this letter to you, my friend, and by association to all our NCHC colleagues who remember you as an incomparable teacher, scholar, and leader as well as beloved friend. This letter is the link to what is in my heart. No password needed, just love.

It's hard to believe that our 2018 conference in Boston is already in the past. But as Gavin Stevens in William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* says, "The past is never dead. It isn't even past." I am still reveling in the warmth and generosity—not to mention the unexpected and humbling surprise—of receiving the Sam Schuman Award at the Awards and Fellows celebration. I

thought the event was a glorious celebration of the students, faculty, staff, and leaders of our organization who have devoted much of their talents, skills, and passions to make NCHC a wonderful home, a cherished family. What a treasure that the award carries your name!

My letter is long overdue, but I wanted to say how grateful I am for the honor of the award. I was unprepared to deliver any sort of formal speech, but I hope that you were listening and that my few words were enough to pay homage to your incalculable influence on our community and to reveal that I spoke honestly and deeply from my heart. You were and still are a hero, plain and simple, and you have touched the lives, stirred the imagination, and sharpened the intellect of countless NCHC folks. To hold an award in your name is praise beyond compare.

You have left many of us with countless warm memories and beautiful dreams, Sam. I remember presenting with you at annual meetings, conducting a program review with you, chatting with you in hallways, learning from you in workshops and sessions, and enjoying the elegance of your words when you shared your wisdom or spun a witty yarn. No matter the topic of discussion, you were always a first-class act with a boyish, genuine smile . . . and not just because of your perfect, crisp shirts and classy leather suspenders! I also remember running into you, literally, at the 2011 conference in Phoenix, where the outside temperature, despite the fall dates, was over 100 degrees. I was returning from an insane run of my own when I spotted a colorful figure just ahead as I was nearing the hotel. He was decked out in a full jogging suit, making his way indomitably toward the hotel. It was Sam Schuman! You were slowed down but undaunted by your illness. When we reached the hotel lobby, you leaned slightly toward me and said, “John, you’re a good friend.” I will never forget the moment. It was Sam Schuman all the way. Three years later, you were gone from us but never lost.

Thank you, Sam, and all our NCHC friends for another defining moment in my honors career and in my personal life. I know that many hands played a role in the blessing—Jeff Portnoy, Ada Long, office staff, awards committee, and others—and I am grateful for all. To repeat the Yeats lines that came to mind during my impromptu speech:

Think where man’s glory most begins and ends,  
And say my glory was I had such friends.

—“The Municipal Gallery Revisited”

Certainly, Sam, your precious friendship comes to mind . . . and so do the bonds I share with all the others I respect, trust, and love in NCHC. The tribute of the Schuman Award—*your* award, Sam—is more than I deserve. Thank you for enriching my life and reminding us of the gift of our true calling when you said, “Teachers need to love their subject matter, and they need to love their students, and they need to love bringing them together.” The wonder of well-chosen words.

Forever your grateful admirer,  
John

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