Arnold Band met with a small group of UCLA faculty in 1967 and 1968 and, based on some humanities courses being taught as part of the general education curriculum at the time, worked with the Dean of Humanities, Philip Levine, and various Academic Senate committees to establish a graduate program in comparative literature. Under Arnold Band’s guidance, that small, almost ragtag program is now a thriving and still-expanding department. How did he do it? How did this renowned scholar of Hebrew and modern Israeli literature manage to oversee the development of a major comparative literature department that from its earliest stages cultivated a wide range of multicultural, often marginalized fields rather than the more traditional European studies of most comparative literature departments? (Among our first Ph.D.’s were students from Turkey, Japan, Iran, and Nigeria, as well as Italy and Finland!)

I can only offer bits and pieces of personal information, but I think he did it with a combination of intuition (something he would hate to admit), intellectual power (something that comes easily to him), a gruff sense of humor (just ask anyone who knows him), and unrelenting drive (any number of deans will certify this). I first met him when I was recruited in 1969 from the Department of English at Hunter College in New York by the Scandinavian Section, some of whose faculty I knew, and this new Comparative Literature Program, chaired by someone named Band. I was the first joint appointment in Comparative Literature. My fields were Scandinavian, English, and French, but I think I was acceptable to Arnold Band because I had passed a tough reading exam in Latin at Berkeley, and, as I discovered later, he had majored in classics at Harvard, and his Greek was probably as good as his Hebrew; only later did I learn about his Italian, German, and French.

One of the first things he told me to do after I arrived on campus in a three-piece suit on a hot summer day was to join the faculty club. He told me that most university business was done there. While that may have been true, I suspect now that he just wanted someone to have lunch with a couple of times a week, something we have done for over thirty
years, our lunch table at times expanding to include six or eight other faculty and administrators, because, indeed, a lot of university business gets done there. After a while the faculty club helped me to understand how Arnold, Arnie as his wife and many of his friends call him, played such an important role, not only in the Comparative Literature Program and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, but in the university at large.

During our first discussions, he told me I would be deeply involved in the creation of a new graduate program and an expanding undergraduate program in humanities, with all the fun and responsibility that such a task involved. All this sounded exciting and convinced me to leave my position at Hunter. And it turned out to be true. I was deeply involved in the program in my first year and loved it. Unfortunately, I discovered that he also meant that a year after my arrival he was going on sabbatical to Israel for a year, and I would have to be chair in his absence. I think I wrote him a string of semihysterical letters that year (unfortunately, we didn’t have e-mail in those days) and made a few phone calls. He was calm and supportive, giving me advice when I needed it and telling me not to worry about it when I thought I had just made a colossal mistake. I suspect that he may have gotten a number of complaints about me that year, not least from Dean Levine, but that year established a pattern, and we alternated chairing the program for some twenty years. We worked together with the faculty who had been initially involved and then with new faculty who were hired over the years. What characterized Band’s open-minded guidance of Comparative Literature was a mixture of fairness, reasonableness, and aggressive effort to sustain and develop the program. Based on his leadership, we hired some brilliant faculty. Band claimed not to have been overly aware that we were probably the first program or department in UCLA’s Humanities division to have an equal number of male and female faculty; we just chose the best people, and half of them turned out to be women. I took some pride in this, but to him it was simply logical. One trusted his sense of logic because so many people reached out to him for his advice. I suppose it was not until I was at a Jewish wedding of a mutual student of ours that I realized what an admired and important figure he is to the Los Angeles Jewish community. His toast there was erudite and sophisticated yet filled with warmth and grace, and the bride and groom and our student’s family glowed with pride.

Over time I came to realize that Arnold knows an unbelievable number of people, not only on campus, but everywhere. Ora Band, Kathy Komar, Arnold, and I were at an International Comparative Literature Conference in Tokyo a number of years ago, and a group of us were out one evening strolling down a busy Tokyo street. Suddenly a man walked up to Arnold and said, “Aren’t you Arnold Band?” The rest of us watched
in amusement and amazement as Arnold and the man renewed an old friendship and discussed people they knew. We weren’t exactly surprised. We had been with Arnold and Ora in New York and watched as people there would grab him and say, “I took a class with you in such and such a year,” or, “You came to my nephew’s bar mitzvah,” or, “I heard your talk in Boston,” but somehow such a chance meeting in Tokyo seemed both amazing and absolutely typical. He can’t go anywhere without meeting somebody who knows somebody who has stayed at his house or visited him while he was in Israel. Ora Band of course is a crucial part of this circle of warmth and friendship that has surrounded the Band family and house for so many years. They have regularly had receptions and dinners there, and a sense of loving family life and intellectual energy pervades everything they do.

It is Arnold’s quality of gruff love, of intellectual curiosity and depth, as well as a sense of genuine caring that so many people have experienced over the years, and that’s why they, or their friends, or their relatives’ friends, come up to him on the street and say hello. He has a sense of loyalty that comes across in all these casual meetings and even more powerfully in his daily life. All of us in Comparative Literature have had the opportunity to benefit from that loyalty; he has supported us fiercely in any number of difficult times. But his loyalty comes with a price. I remember once when, because of my own impatience, I had accidentally done something that offended another faculty member. Arnold called me in, and we had a serious conversation about the obligation one has to be patient and considerate of other faculty members as well as of one’s students. I don’t think I ever made that mistake again.

On the other hand, to this day I don’t know how he managed to remain so patient with as many people as he did and still accomplish so much. He was always trying to balance the demands made upon him by the Comparative Literature Program and the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department, as well as play a central role in the development of the Jewish Studies Program. Yet he could sit and talk for extended periods of time with difficult students, students whom others of us simply found exhausting. At the same time, he kept publishing article after article and reading an extraordinary range of books. He was our own private fount of knowledge, a kind of in-house encyclopedia. We all admired him for this, but I suspect he had no choice. I think insomnia gave him an unfair academic advantage; while the rest of us were sleeping he was up reading and working. This expansive range of knowledge came in handy when we were hiring new faculty. We could always count on him to know a good deal about any field we were interested in. Besides that, he is a great storyteller. He has travelled extensively and given lectures almost everywhere, and every time he
comes back from a trip he has new stories, new facts and information. I have learned much about the world and the people in it from those lunches we shared together.

He can be stubborn, though. As the Comparative Literature faculty and student body expanded we needed more space. He kept after the Dean until he finally agreed and gave us the offices we needed. Unfortunately, one faculty member had to be moved to another building, and he didn’t want to go. I think he thought he could wait out or outwit Arnold, but he didn’t have a chance. Arnold always worked closely with UCLA’s administrators, though I have heard him be surprisingly blunt with senior members of the administration when he disagreed with them. In any case, the reluctant faculty member found his books, desk, and chairs moved to another building one day. I moved into that office, and the man has barely spoken to me since. This was a case where logic was simply inescapable and Arnold insisted on it. With our interdepartmental and interdisciplinary interests as well as our fine faculty we were, we felt, going to be of genuine importance to the university, and the administration needed to recognize that fact. To continue our development we needed a shared space, and he got it for us.

Part of the intellectual and physical cohesion that has united the Comparative Literature faculty for decades has been a sense of mutual commitment, not only to each other but to the multicultural and multi-ethnic society in which we happily found ourselves. That commitment and support was centered in Arnold, and the rest of us just picked it up and spread it around. He loves students and cultures from all over the world. While this volume of essays generously reflects his classical Hebrew and modern Jewish studies, friends, and students, I have seen him work closely with students from Japan, Lebanon, Egypt, England, and Germany. The students sense his interest in their work and his willingness to help them if they are willing to learn. He expresses civility in everything he does; in all the years we have worked together no matter how difficult the circumstances seemed, I don’t think I have ever heard him get really mad.

The story about expanding our office space may seem like an odd story to tell, but it reflects Arnold. He was never driven by a need for power, but when a little progress was necessary, he would take that step. Comparative Literature has grown slowly but consistently, partially because, at Arnold’s instigation, we were always careful to work closely with faculty in other departments. He has great respect for his colleagues and his students, and they recognize this and trust him because of it. He has always been willing to have lunches in private corners when colleagues needed to consult with him about an awkward personnel situation or a personal problem. It is his combination
of wisdom, reason, and loyalty that attracts people. He teaches a bit less now but still works with a variety of graduate students. He gives them that same blend of practical advice and intellectual challenge that I have enjoyed so much during those lunches that he suggested I attend when I first arrived at UCLA.

Ross Shideler

When he insisted on interviewing me in a “Choc Full O’ Nuts” coffee shop instead of one of the Modern Language Association Conference hotels (because the conference was boring and “like a meat market”), I knew I was destined to like Arnold Band. Still, as strange as this appointment was, I sat waiting for a dignified, serious professor when in walked a smiling patriarchal figure in an overcoat a few sizes too big. (Gogol leaped to mind, but I later found out the overcoat belonged to Arnold’s friend and dean, Phil Levine.) We began discussing our interests and discovered we were both teaching Catch 22. Arnold taught it as part of his Comedy course, and I was inflicting it on unsuspecting Princeton undergraduates. From that moment our fates were sealed. I knew I had found both a mentor and a kindred spirit. This was a man I wanted to work for and with. And I was enthusiastic as he assured me that I would be “fully involved” in the Comparative Literature Program at UCLA from the very beginning. I later discovered that that meant that I would have the opportunity to work twenty-five hours a day for the Program—but strangely enough, that seemed legitimate since Arnold was right in the trenches with us.

Before I arrived at UCLA, I had without much explanation sent Arnold cartons of books in anticipation of my imminent debarkation. Since his office was the only address I had at UCLA, I shipped all my books to him. After receiving what eventually became several dozen whiskey boxes (which were the strongest boxes a local market could give me for free) packed to the brim with books, he stacked them floor to ceiling in his office. Not in the least fearful that an office full of whiskey boxes would damage his reputation, Arnold’s only comment when I arrived was that my packing technique had deteriorated as I went along. When I did finally show up in his office to claim my only possessions, Arnold looked at me and said encouragingly, “Do I know you?” I had admittedly lost about thirty pounds and was wearing cutoff jeans and a T-shirt covered with the dust of the last three deserts I had driven through. Nonetheless, his greeting did nothing to assuage my fear that this job was all a fantasy that would be dispelled by a wizard upon my
arriving at the UCLA campus, which I had only seen on television during bowl games. My stuttered response was, "God, I hope so...." After a brief recognition scene worthy of the Odyssey (but lacking the revealing of any scars), Arnold took me to see Ross Shideeler. In one of Arnold's many prophetic moments, he exclaimed, "You'll love Ross; everybody does!" Ross and I were married several years later.

I eventually came to expect such premonitions and even omniscience from Arnold. He possesses, for example, the power to declare any day of the week to be a Friday. When we managed to survive until Friday, the Comparative Literature faculty and often faculty from other departments as well as some of our graduate students would gather in our humble lounge with soft drinks, pretzels, "wine in a box," chips, and dips to celebrate together the fact that we had survived another week. When Fridays seemed all too far off, and we were about to go under, Arnold would appear and declare it to be Friday. This miraculous power often saved a beleaguered and overworked academic crew. I began to think Arnold godlike—and in fact found a volume in the Comparative Literature library entitled Arnold and God. Although the author thought he was investigating Matthew Arnold, I was convinced that the volume referred to Arnold Band, a joke to which he assented, though he demurred at my suggestion that it should be "Arnold is God."

Given his good-natured godlike status, Arnold became my substitute for a reference encyclopedia. Whenever I needed a fact for class, I'd go to Arnold. Professor Shideeler used to say, "Why don't you look it up?" but I knew that the Band reference service would provide much more interesting fare. I was teaching Günther Grass's The Tin Drum, for example, and I needed to know the history of Danzig. Having been bored by the encyclopedia information, I went to Arnold, who began, "Well, of course you know there was a curse on the city...." I knew I should have gone to him first! But beyond his academic strengths, Arnold was a model (not always to be emulated) of administrative wile. I watched astoundedly as he would fire a rhetorical shotgun from the hip into a crowd of administrative types. There was always a moment when they tried to process what was happening, and then they would end up agreeing to Arnold's demands. (I must confess that this technique was less successful when attempted by a 5'2" blond female—in fact, it resulted in nothing but stunned silences. When I later chaired Comparative Literature, I learned that some techniques are indeed gender specific.) Although he remains my administrative role model, I have had to modify some of the lessons I learned at his side.

One lesson that I will never unlearn, however, is that of Arnold's relentless honesty and absolutely committed critical engagement. He will never let a sloppy idea slide or allow an awkward sentence to escape his
pen. While this characteristic can sometimes be painful to those of us rash enough to ask him to read our work, it never fails to improve the object upon which it is focused. What makes Arnold’s critical acuity special, however, is that it is coupled with a generosity of spirit that impels him to spend hours with students and colleagues to perfect their ideas and review their work.

Arnold is one of those rare mentors who cannot travel even to the ends of the earth without running into a former student. And even more depressing is the fact that he remembers not only their names, but their entire life histories. He cannot stroll down an avenue or cross an airport without having someone hail him to catch up on the time since they had had him in class. In fact, like the truth in all good literary phenomena, Arnold is recognized even in his absence. While buying a new rug for our living room from a Middle Eastern carpet merchant, we found out that he had attended various functions for Jewish studies at UCLA. When we mentioned Arnold’s name, the man’s face lit up, and he knocked 10 percent off the price we had already agreed on. For a while, I thought Arnold had somehow arranged such encounters. But people recognizing his name became such a common occurrence that I began to believe he must have taught at least a million students (a figure that may not be far wrong).

And those of us who are his colleagues are no less his students. Arnold has waged wars on our behalf (entirely just wars, of course!)—and more taxing for him, he has adjusted to our idiosyncrasies. When one of his several female hires, Katherine King—a scholar from Princeton who nevertheless has the soul of a social revolutionary—was crocheting at a faculty meeting, Arnold asked “What are you knitting?” I am confident that he did not expect the response, “A string bikini,” but he took it in stride. He has attempted to civilize us over the years—demanding saucers under cups and trying valiantly to teach us the proper way to peel an orange, but he has never demanded that we change to fit his image of the world. (Only once did he give in to the temptation to turn me over to a group holding a guitar mass on campus by shouting the words, “Here’s one who got away,” while pointing an accusing finger in my direction.) He and Ora are famous for their hospitality as well as the intellectual liveliness of their events. They revel in the diversity they encounter among all their acquaintances. I believe Arnold might even have a soft spot in his heart for my hometown of Joliet, Illinois (although he has studiously avoided testing this theory except for a fleeting salute as he flies over Joliet while approaching O’Hare). Only narrow-mindedness or mean-spiritedness truly anger him. More characteristic of his demeanor is that quick and ironic smile that makes him squint and a relentless intellectual curiosity that makes him irrepressible and irresistible.
I doubt that I will ever meet anyone quite like Arnold Band again. I am grateful to know and to work with him. He succeeded my Doktorvater as my intellectual father-figure (no Freud intended!)—and I am certainly not alone in this experience. May he continue to thrive and to mentor many more generations.

_Kathleen L. Komar_