***A wordy, prolix, verbose introductory note from Doc about Organic Chemistry***

A long time ago (probably pre-dating the Pleistocene Age) in a galaxy far, far away I sat in my first Organic Chemistry class just like you. There were some differences of course. Instead of ~30 students in a class, I shared airspace with over 400. Our instructor was also a forbiddingly brilliant, world-famous, world-class, wunderkind of an organic chemist who had published well over 1000 papers in refereed journals.

In contrast your current co-instructor (me) has published 10, and I am not in the least bit famous. Hell, I don’t even have a Facebook page- though in my defense, I have 6 patents- which the frighteningly famous guy does not.

All that aside, just like you, at the start of the term I was excited, a little scared, yet utterly determined to master what haggard veterans of the Organic wars told me was an impossible amount of material- no matter what it took. I was a born-again chemist and burned with bright, nerdy zeal to excel. I would not be denied.

Two quarters later, I contemplated dropping out of school, even though I’d end up in Vietnam possessed of an M-16, trench foot and a robust case of crotch critters. I hated Organic that much.

Never have I ever felt more intellectually unequal to the task of learning something. Never have I been more demoralized. The only thing that kept me from quitting and getting drafted was that I figured with my Gook face atop an American uniform both sides would shoot at me.

So, it’s cosmically ironic that I have now entered my 20th year teaching Organic Chemistry here at Alfred utterly loving the course. The obvious question is, what the ***fuck*** happened?

The short answer: I got one a good teacher down the road. Obviously not the famous guy- he sucked massively. In fact, for me to do right by you as my students, I just need to remember what he did-and do the opposite. It is cliché and shopworn to say it, but one good teacher can change your life. One did for me. As the term goes on, I’ll fill you in on the details of the story. Suffice it to say, I want to pay it forward.

So know that I have sworn to never, ever, ever make students feel like I did learning Organic Chemistry. It took decades for the wounds from my first experience to heal. I know intimately well what it feels like to be intellectually battered. The sad thing is, it still happens at the big schools. Ask anyone who takes Organic at the Cornells, UBs and Penn States of the world. They’ll tell you bitterly that the teacher’s attitude towards them was essentially an indifference and arrogance that bordered on abuse.

In point of fact, Organic Chemistry is actually a ton of fun-**if** it’s pitched right. The even better news for you is, that after all my tears and travails in the Organic bush leagues, I think I’ve finally got the pitch down and I look forward with the eagerness of a 2 month old puppy to teaching you.

Of course, I could have the pitch all wrong with your class. Like with baseball, every season’s different. This is where **you** have to get in the game.

The only way I can tell what’s working (or not) is for **you guys** **not** to just sit out there like bulge-eyed, terrified, tongue-tied toads. You must croak out lustily and loud when you are confuzzled, clueless or think I’m full of shit. That kind of freewheeling give and take is the sacred kernel of everything I want to happen in the classroom. I want you to speak out often, vigorously, fearlessly.

You absolutely have to ask questions and voice your confusions in class. Don’t wait until you get back to your dorm room after dinner and a joint and try to recapitulate what you think I said 6 hours earlier. That’s a fool’s errand. Don’t worry that `you’ll slow me down’ or that you might sound stupid to the class. Trust me. If you are confused, 75% of your fellow students out there are too. Know too, that I will erase anyone who makes fun of you asking questions in class. Not only does that dog not hunt, I will cheerfully disembowel the dog.

So, ask questions, make sound and fury, get in the game, have fun, and don’t be a stranger. Got it, maggots?

Doc Fong 8/17/17