Weiler leaves after seven years at U-M

A fter what he called “seven wondrous years in Ann Arbor,” Professor Joseph Weiler has left the U-M Law School to join the Harvard Law faculty. Weiler’s teaching and research have focused on European Community law, international law, and comparative law. “Joe Weiler’s departure is my deepest regret,” said Lee Bollinger.

When asked to comment on leaving Michigan, Weiler submitted the following:

A faculty advisor to Law Quad Notes asked me to write a few words about my departure.

I am a leaver. World class, compulsive and consummate. A connoisseur of all nuances of exodus, departure, withdrawal, migration. The quintessential Wandering Jew. Sometimes I think it is genetic. Consider my parents: My father, may he live to be 120, was born in Riga, Latvia. In 1921, his family left and settled in Palestine. In 1925, after finishing high school in Tel Aviv, he and his brother left Palestine and wandered to the United States. The brother, my Uncle Simon settled in Paris, Texas and still lives there. But my father left the United States and moved to South Africa where he met and married my mother.

Her grandparents were also born in Russia, but they left and moved in the late 19th century to England. (They, at least, had a good reason: pogroms). My mother’s parents left England (cold and grey and no work) and went to the Belgian Congo(!). My mother was born in Elisabethville. They left and moved south to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). She left again and moved to South Africa. I was born there, but didn’t stay long. My parents left and returned to Israel. In Israel I lived first on a kibbutz, left, and moved to the Mediterranean town of Haifa, left again, and moved to Jerusalem. After completing my army service, I left Israel and went to live and study in England where I met my wife. We left and moved to Italy, and then, after seven years, we left again and moved to Ann Arbor where we spent another seven wondrous years. My children, all three, were born in Ann Arbor. If you suspect a note of apology in this somewhat dizzying tale, you would be right. We have done it again! We have left Ann Arbor and Michigan Law School and have moved to Boston and Harvard.

What have been the reactions?

First the institution. Every religion worth its name has a complex taxonomy of sin: grading sin must be a particularly pleasurable pastime — living it vicariously. At Michigan, leaving is always considered bad, sometimes sad. If you are 61 and leave for Florida, it is more sad than bad. If you are 51 and leave, say, for Columbia, it is quite bad and quite sad. If you are 41 and leave for Harvard it is just bad. A really serious transgression. Inexcusable. Actually the Law School has acted with grace and sympathy.

And friends? There is an exquisite symmetry in the attitude of friends and “friends,” most notable in the period when it was known I was “being considered” at Harvard. My friends wanted me to get the offer because they knew it would please me. They hoped I wouldn’t because they knew I would accept it. As for my “friends,” well they wanted me to get the offer from Harvard, because they knew I would accept it. And they hoped I wouldn’t get it, because they knew it would please me. Leaving is hard.

Still, in my future Guide to Cozy Departures, rule number one will be: Always leave when the going is good, when feelings are cordial, when memories are agreeable, when homesickness is assured to set in. The key to a successful departure is a delicate, ever present, lingering sense of regret.

And so I feel about my departure from Michigan.

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