

*His love affair with IU began in 1936. Today, at 83, Henry Remak says teaching freshmen and sophomores is a special joy.*

# Don't Give Up on Anyone

**S**omewhere east of Okinawa, the tanker ship churned homeward through war-time waters. Although Japan was close to surrender by July 1945, fighting still dotted the western Pacific, and enemy submarines still plied the seas, armed and deadly.

A sudden alarm, touched off by the sighting of a conning tower, sent the tanker's crew racing to battle stations. Merchant Marine Ensign Henry Remak donned a life jacket and took his post at the ship's pharmacy, a location that made him the most exposed person aboard. Time ticked by without an attack, however, and the tension gradually drained out of the crew. The ship was riding high in the water, and the Japanese sub commander apparently chose not to waste a torpedo on an empty tanker.

The next day, the ship's paper printed a story about the encounter and illustrated it with a drawing of Ensign Remak standing at the rails, gazing at a conning tower. The caption read: "Don't shoot – Ph.D."

Laughter bubbles irrepressibly from Henry Remak when he tells that story today. He was not really a Ph.D. yet, he notes, but he would collect that degree two years later at the University of Chicago. Nor was he yet a professor of Germanic studies, comparative literature, and West European studies, nor dean of faculties, nor director of the IU Institute for Advanced Studies, nor chairman of West European studies, nor visiting professor at the universities of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Lille, and Hamburg, nor Fulbright lecturer in France and Germany, nor Sagamore of the Wabash, nor any of the other titles that would come his way in the next half-century.

At 83, Henry H.H. Remak is still in the classroom. Since "retiring" in 1987, he has regularly taught honors and Arts and Sciences undergraduates, mainly freshmen



by **WALTON R. COLLINS**

**JOIE DE VIVRE** ■  
In this photo from the 1970s, raconteur extraordinaire Henry Remak sits (briefly) to tell a story. Photo INDIANA ALUMNI MAGAZINE archives.

and sophomores. He relishes teaching undergraduates, which doesn't necessarily make him unique in today's university setting but may put him in a minority.

"After the Ph.D., young scholars and teachers think graduate courses are the ones to teach," he says. "But while graduate courses are very important for the immortality of each of us — these are the people who carry on our work — I began to feel that it was a greater challenge to give undergraduates an experience that would stick with them no matter what they would do in life. And that's the truth. It does stick with you."

His students agree. In 1962 he received the all-university distinguished teaching award. Current students are still joining his fan club. One of them, telecommunications major Sarah Mottley, '01, says his course "Art and the Intellect vs. Life," which explored the writings of Thomas Mann, "affected not only my writing style but my outlook on life, and opened my eyes to the complexities of man.

"I was fascinated with Henry Remak from the first day of class," Mottley says. "He strolled in clad in an unusual pair of checked pants and a lime green sweater vest. Instead of lecturing, he encouraged us to spill our thoughts in discussion. He made each student feel like a person with something intelligent to say. He was interested in our daily lives, our hobbies, dreams, goals, and personalities."

One of Remak's trademarks as a teacher is the half-hour every student gets to spend with him in his office during the semester. "I have no agenda for these sessions," he says. "I just say, 'How are you doing? How are things going for you?' I don't want them coming in just because they have a problem."

English major David Long, '01, who recently took a Remak course, applauds such accessibility. "Profes-

or Remak wants students to be intrinsically motivated to learn," Long says. "He places conversation — just sitting down and talking about interesting things — well above completing a certain number of credit hours. He thinks conversation is the key to intellectual development, and he makes himself available at any time. His enthusiasm about developing thought processes through examination of literature was enough to get most students motivated to do better work than they would do for most other classes."

These informal teacher-student chats, Remak opines, "seem to me something every teacher in a class of 25 or 30 could do. That's the fun of it." And clearly, teaching remains fun for Remak, even after 60-some years at it.

"Our better students today are just a joy," he says. "There is no literary canon left for the professionals in literary studies, but there are canons left in society at large, so it's much easier to defend great works to undergraduate students than to my colleagues. I try not to indoctrinate my students, but I try to tell them why I have chosen these works."

His assignments also tend to differ from the norm. "I prefer for students to read twice rather than read twice as much, because if you race through 100 pages a night, where is the pleasure? I tell them to read a book for the first time taking no notes. Just sit down and read and enjoy it. Then wait for a day or two and read it a second time, now reading for notes. The difference between the first and second reading is enormous. Even if I teach something 22 times, I discover something new."

Basically, says Remak, "I teach the Great Books." A typical reading list might run from the Greeks to the beginning of the 18th century: Sophocles, Plato, the Old Testament, Erasmus. In a course covering later

periods, the list might include Shelley, Nietzsche, Kafka — and the Declaration of Independence.

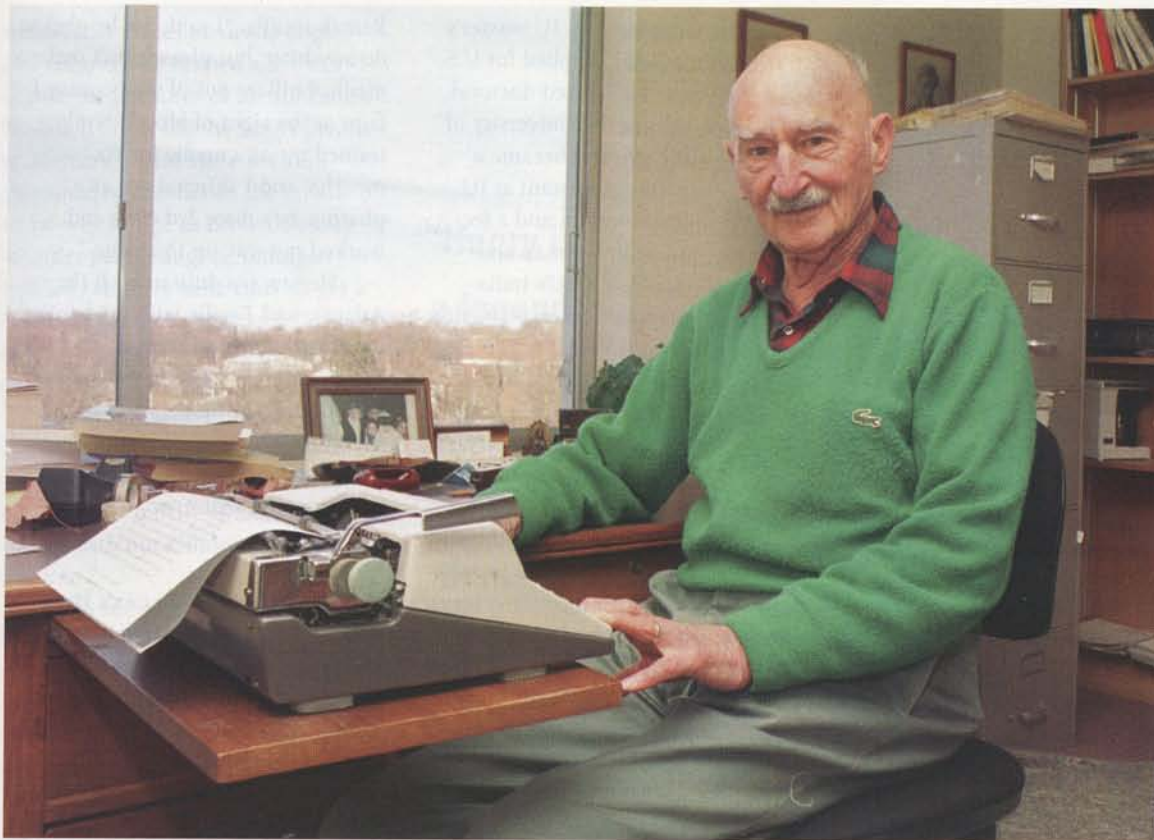
"I think the declaration is a beautiful and wonderfully literate document," Remak explains. "I think it takes someone not born here to understand that the American Declaration of Independence is the most humane document ever to emerge from a revolution, especially compared to the French Revolution's attitude of 'throw the rascals out; hang 'em, kill 'em.' But the American declaration makes you weep: 'Oh, we're so reluctant to do this; we've tried everything; these are our cousins in England; we've remonstrated; we have no alternative.' I'm not at all ashamed to assign this.

"I think literature has to make a difference in your life, and the Great Books do that. And undergraduate students take to it beautifully. So I've been very happy teaching undergraduates. They have a lot of common sense."

**"The American Declaration of Independence is the most humane document ever to emerge from a revolution."**

**H**enry Remak is fluent in German, his native language, and French, the language in which he did his undergraduate studies, as well as English, Spanish, and, in a more limited way, Italian. It's appropriate, then, that his Ballantine Hall office (he also shares a studio office in the Poplars) is located in a sixth-floor intersection of the French and German faculty wings.

It is quite possibly the most cluttered office on IU's eight campuses. Books and papers and less nameable objects are piled high on every flat surface. Atop one cluster of cabinets, a mountain of yellowed documents leans precariously, frozen in midflight to the floor; for Remak, it is a favorite part of the scenery ("those papers remind me of icicles in the mountains, hanging down"). A string of empty wine bottles ("I tell students not one drop of the wine



**THE LONG VIEW**  
 ■ In 1999, from his shared office in the Poplars, Henry Remak can look out on the campus he first came to as an émigré in 1936. Photo Heather Hill.

was consumed on campus”) lines the tops of several bookcases. A *National Geographic* map of the world hangs on one wall.

“This is sort of like Doctor Faust’s study,” acknowledges the proprietor of the mess. “I have no rational excuse, because the university archives are very interested in acquiring complete files from faculty members. They would take all this, but I don’t have enough time. Of course, if I just put it all in boxes and never looked at it, I could get rid of it in a couple of days; but it would be very difficult not to look at all these things. Anyway,” he quips, peering closely at the listener to gauge the response, “a clean, uncluttered desk is the sign of a sick mind.”

From his window in Ballantine, he has an enviable view of the heart of the campus. “As the Germans say, I can spit into the president’s office,” he chuckles.

And through the trees he can

discern the Musical Arts Center, a sight that pleases him. Henry Remak is an unabashed lover of the humanities: history, languages, and, in particular, music. “I would love to conduct,” he says. “I would love to be a singer.”

He has, in fact, appeared in seven IU operas in the last two decades. “Obviously, they have not allowed me to sing,” he says with a laugh; “very narrow-minded of them. But if you have only a sentence to say in an opera — in my best roles I had maybe eight or 10 words — then you are a principal, and your name appears on the program, and you get part of a dressing room. If you just appear on stage and don’t say anything, though, you don’t get a dressing room.

“On the other hand ...,” he begins, then pauses, amused by the phrase, to wander down a conversational cul-de-sac: “My father was an engineer, and he called all of us

professors, especially humanists, ‘on-the-other-hand people.’ He said, ‘If I built an on-the-other-hand bridge, I would be in the penitentiary.’”

Remak’s last operatic role was in *La Traviata*. “I was engaged as one of four waiters,” he explains. “Then we were upgraded to four butlers. And then, in the second week of rehearsals, the stage manager upgraded me to head butler. So I told my university colleagues, ‘It took me a week to get promoted in the opera, and look how long it took me to get promoted in the university.’”

He is fascinated by the amount of cooperation required to mount a performance: “I found one thing wonderful about opera, and this is a criticism, in a sense, of the professionalism in the humanities now: In opera, everybody’s in it together, and this is a great experience in a university that has become so career-oriented. The principals are very nice to the extras, and they’re very supportive of each other. And they’re self-critical, which is no longer fashionable in universities. But I don’t really blame our younger faculty; they have to pile (scholarly output) on and pile it on and pile it on and amass a quantity of evidence. Otherwise somebody else will pile it on, and they’ll be at a disadvantage.”

His love of history can be traced to a European childhood. “In Europe, you see history around you — fortresses and castles and ruins and churches and cathedrals. It’s there, it’s visible, and you are given to

romanticizing it. I've had a passion, even as a young kid, for very old people, because they *are* history. My grandfather, whom I knew quite well, was born in 1847, and I think maybe he talked to people who knew Napoleon. If he had lived in the United States, he might have talked to people who knew George Washington. When I was a student here in 1937, I met my landlady's grandfather. He had shaken hands with Lincoln.

"History to me is living, not an artificial thing. It's much harder for an American teacher to get students interested in history — there is none here. So I have great respect for our history teachers."

**H**enry Remak, born in Berlin, had good reason to leave Hitler Germany in 1936 at the age of 20: "I was of the Jewish religion," he told the Indiana German Heritage Society in a speech a couple of years ago. "Hitler's first year looked ominous, but there was hardly anyone among us who expected him to last indefinitely."

In 1936 Remak was studying in France but returned to Berlin for the Olympic Games. He quickly realized it was time to abandon his homeland. "By that time," he told the German Heritage Society audience, "emigration for the young became inevitable."

U.S. visas were hard to obtain, but Remak managed to secure a non-quota student visa. He ended up at Indiana University in part because the IU chapter of Sigma Alpha Mu, a historically Jewish fraternity, offered him free room, board, and pocket money.

"I took to Indiana University like a duck to water," he confesses. "It seemed like a paradise to me. And frankly, it still does."



#### REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

■ This photo from the 1950s shows Henry Remak in his first decade of teaching at IU. More than 40 years later, he's still in the classroom. Photo INDIANA ALUMNI MAGAZINE archives.

He completed an IU master's degree in 1937, applied for U.S. citizenship, started doctoral studies at the University of Chicago, and became a teaching assistant at IU Bloomington and a lecturer in German and Spanish at IU's Indianapolis center. Soon after World War II began, he was approached by the FBI with a request that still makes him shake his head in wonderment and delight.

"You know, I was officially an enemy alien, and I had to register at the post office. I couldn't leave the state without permission from the attorney general. One day I get a telephone call from the FBI: 'How do you do this morning, Mr. Remak? Could you do us a favor? We need to tell all the residents of Indiana who are German, and all the Italians, that they must register. We understand you are proficient in both languages, and would you please make an announcement for us that we can play on all the radio stations in Indiana?' So I made the recording."

In 1943 he was sworn in as a U.S. citizen and soon thereafter got a letter from the Navy inviting him to enlist. "That didn't work out because I didn't pass the physical, but the next call was from the U.S. Office of Censorship, saying they needed somebody for counterintelligence work in Puerto Rico. I spent a year there in an office that intercepted communications between Europe and Latin America."

Next, "feeling guilty because I was exempted from military service," Remak tried to join the Army. Rejected again when lung X-rays indicated an old, inactive touch of tuberculosis, he turned to the Merchant Marines, who signed him right up.

"They gave me a questionnaire: 'What would you be good at?'"

Remak recalls. "I said, 'I'll be glad to do anything, but please don't make a medical officer out of me because I faint at the sight of blood.' So they trained me as a medic for six months, and I shipped out as a pharmacist's mate 3rd class and worked my way up to ensign."

He saw sea duty in both the Atlantic and Pacific without fainting once, and he feels lucky to have had the experience. "The more you've seen of life, the better you can teach literature," he says. "I once proposed giving scholars a year outside of academe, but that never worked out."

**H**erman B Wells is one of Henry Remak's heroes. He said so recently in a column published in the university's internal newsweekly, *Home Pages*. He praised Wells for his "courage in risking the loss of short-term but, to presidents of thinner quality, indispensable popularity by his farsighted, pragmatic vision of what was then a fine but, with shining exceptions, essentially regional university of 5,000 students becoming a national and international academic center."

To Professor of Journalism Cleve Wilhoit, who served as associate director of the Institute for Advanced Study when Remak was its director from 1988 to 1994, Remak shares something of Wells' stature. "It sounds trite," Wilhoit apologizes, "but Henry is a legend among his colleagues and thousands of students. No one equals Chancellor Wells' importance to IU, but Henry comes awfully close. Helping students improve their minds through literature, history, the arts, and writing has enabled him to live one of the richest lives I've ever encountered. Thirty years ago when I first joined IU, Henry Remak was in his prime. He's still in his prime!"

Physically as well as intellectually, Remak belies his 83 years. He

walks most places he needs to go, and although he carried a driver's license for purposes of identification for much of his life, he hasn't driven in 35 years — not since his auto encountered another in the middle of a one-way bridge in Brown County. Weather permitting, he indulges regularly in three-mile runs. "I get a lot of encouragement from fellow runners as they fly past me," he quips.

He has, however, largely given up tennis, once his hallmark mode of exercise. "I still play now and then," he says, "but mostly at family reunions with our children and grandchildren."

With his wife, Ingrid, he lives in an unpretentious house within walking distance of campus. The youngest of their four children, Ron, BS'79, is a businessman in Bloomington, which means Remak gets to see a lot

of three of his seven grandchildren. Sons Andy, MAT'75, and Bruce, BA'72, MS'75, live in Milwaukee and Minneapolis, respectively, and daughter Heidi, BA'74, lives in New Jersey.

Remak remains a traveler. He was in Philadelphia in late spring for a meeting, flew to Paris in May for another, and on the way home stopped in Copenhagen to visit his sister. In August he went to China, and this fall he will join a University of Chicago alumni tour to Tunisia.

For all that Henry Remak is a citizen of the world, he considers himself lucky to have landed in Bloomington when he arrived in this country. "I've had offers to leave IU, but I was never tempted," he says. "Bloomington is an excellent place for a family. It has everything you want. And it's beautiful."

He's also glad he chose the

United States as his adopted country. He views the American system of higher education as "one of the great institutions of civilization." He still treasures memories of the early days when he taught at the IU extension center in Indianapolis and older students would come directly from work to evening classes, tired but eager to learn. "That's the wonderful part of American education," he declares. "Don't give up on anyone."

If there were a Henry H.H. Remak escutcheon, its motto might easily be "Don't give up on anyone." 🍀

.....  
 Walton R. Collins, MPA'76, adjunct associate professor of American studies at the University of Notre Dame, was editor of Notre Dame Magazine from 1983 until his retirement in 1995. From 1969 to 1983, he was assistant to the chancellor at IU South Bend.

**"Henry is a legend among thousands of students."**



Richard Darling

## *Make a Lasting Impression ...*

The Haugh Plaza, located on the south side of the new Virgil T. DeVault Alumni Center, is one of the most popular reception areas in our new home. More than 600 personalized bricks have already been placed in the plaza and have been viewed by hundreds of alumni and friends who have attended functions at the center since its opening in June 1997.

Take this rare opportunity to have your name become a visible part of Indiana University history. Order your brick for yourself, family, or in memory of a loved one with your contribution of \$1,000 or more to the Virgil T. DeVault Alumni Center. All contributions qualify for tax deduction under federal and state guidelines. Money raised through this project will go toward establishing an endowment for maintenance of the building.

The next time you are in Bloomington, drop by the DeVault Alumni Center and see our beautiful new facility. It is your home whenever you are visiting the campus.

**For more information about buying a personalized brick, please call the IU Alumni Association at (800) 824-3044 or (812) 855-4822.**