Chapter 3. Two Historians, One Wedding, and Two Entangled Academic Careers Since the 1960s

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Early modern historians Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen reveal the power of too rare opportunities for full two-career academic life patterns. Sharing the same field of specialization and marrying before graduate degree completion, they gained employment at the then-new York University in Toronto, where a nontenure-track faculty union permitted them both to have fully satisfying careers, Thomas in a tenure-track position and Elizabeth in a nontenure-track one. After 18 years in contract positions with union protection, Elizabeth moved to a tenure-track appointment in 1996, gained tenure and promotion in 2000, and promotion to full professor in 2011. They published independently and together.

This is a story of two entangled academic lives, built by domestic partners, one male, one female, from start to (not quite) finish, over more than five decades from the 1960s. With an understanding—mutual but never spoken—Tom Cohen and Libby Cohen set out to build lives together professionally as well as personally. Although they share a curiosity about the world, present and past, they enjoyed marked differences of temperament and style between them. As Libby is several years behind Tom in age and schooling, their timetable for professional progress has been staggered, as well.

Improvising paths, with some steps conventional and others not, Tom and Libby succeeded in shaping two gratifying academic careers based in Canada but with a sustained European dimension, while steering two children into professional adulthood. Notably, those two separate careers rested on study of the same eras of European history and, later, research in the same archives. The long-term enterprise of their careers was often hard work and took good will, patience, mutual accommodation, and foregoing or postponing some steps to standard advancement. But the Cohens also had cultural assets and institutional support that helped make it work, as well as some good fortune.

For both Tom and Libby, their social and cultural background fostered eventual academic footing. They came from characteristically 1950s families with a professional father and a mother who raised kids and volunteered. Both families valued education and encouraged interest in the larger world. Thomas Cohen, the oldest of three brothers, grew up in suburban Philadelphia. His father was a professor of medicine at Temple University. As an undergraduate at the University

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of Michigan, Tom adopted a Midwestern egalitarianism that helped him shed adolescent cultural snobbery and colored his later career. His childhood delight in collecting information was reinforced by family travels in the United States, Mexico, and Europe. During college, summer trips—with classmates or alone—took him to Costa Rica by car one year and across Europe another. On the road, Tom committed himself to speaking only the local language.

Also the oldest of three siblings, Elizabeth Storr, nicknamed Libby, grew up in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago. Her mother and both grandmothers, though none of them professionals, were college educated. Her father was a professor at the University of Chicago, specializing in the history of higher education in the United States. Conversations at the Storr family dinner table often featured animated discussions of the social roles of universities. The University's Laboratory School, an experimental foreign language program, introduced Libby to French in fourth grade, which she continued to study for the rest of her formal education. More broadly, a politically-engaged university community sparked an early awareness of a society's varied experiential realities and the need to address civil rights and women's rights.

Appropriately, Libby, an undergraduate, and Tom, a graduate student, met at Harvard as auditors in a lecture course on German history. Harvard in the 1960s provided rich resources for learning, and many students gained a measure of intellectual and social self-confidence. Those assets were delivered in an older model of academia that was patriarchal (only one female full professor in the entire university), self-important, and preoccupied with prestige. By the 1960s, those assumptions did not sit well with many at the university.

At Harvard, the academic interests of both Tom and Libby gravitated toward social history framed by the French *Annales* approach and toward Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. Consequently, with concepts from Tom's grad school historiography, Libby's senior thesis was a quantitative study of the early members of the Académie Française. For his PhD dissertation, Tom undertook a statistical analysis of first-generation Jesuits based on a precocious, biographic questionnaire to which all the European members replied in four languages. For him, Harvard provided little dissertation guidance but offered good funding to support a year of research abroad.

After Libby's graduation and their wedding in June 1967, the two Cohens embarked for a year in Rome. Tom undertook research in the Jesuit archive and, classically, returned from the first day in frustrated tears because he could not read the documents. Without clear plans for the future, Libby set out informally to learn Italian and pick up an odd job, such as reading old Italian newspapers for a British journalist's book about Mussolini. By its end, that year abroad delivered not only precious dissertation material, but also lessons in how to live together and among Italians.

The Cohens returned to Cambridge in the fall of 1968 for an eventful year. Libby had decided to begin grad school. She entered Harvard's PhD program in

history with good funding but a less easily satisfied emerging interest in studying women. The academic year 1968-1969 was eventful in both public and university politics, and several weeks of student strikes radically disrupted both their studies during the spring term.

That same spring, deep in coding data for his study of the Jesuits but still far from writing, Tom faced the end of his graduate fellowship and was urged to apply for jobs in an open and generous market. Assuming that Libby would continue in Cambridge, Tom interviewed promisingly at several New England schools. Meanwhile, in Canada, Ontario was busily recruiting faculty to expand its public university system. Unexpectedly, two Toronto universities reached out with offers of interviews.

Tom collected a medley of likely offers for a position as tenure-track Assistant Professor, the common currency of the job market at that time. Choosing among them, he and Libby made an unanticipated decision to leave Cambridge and move to Toronto. The prospect of commuting around Massachusetts among scattered work, studies, and residence felt strenuous. An appetite for fresh opportunities and the chance to live and work in one city propelled their choice, and not, though many asked, flight from the Vietnam War and the draft. Although Canada seemed appealing, learning the nuanced meaning of migration between national cultures lay ahead.

In accepting York University's offer of a cross-appointment in history and humanities, Tom opted for an institution that was young, flexible, and open-minded. In the early 1970s, York University was a fast-growing provincial institution in suburban Toronto designed to serve Ontario's swelling post-secondary population, many of them first-generation students, often recent immigrants. Committed to interdisciplinarity, general education as an undergraduate foundation, a mix of team-teaching and small classes, and instruction in French as well as English, the university's builders hired many young faculty in the humanities and social sciences. Intellectual vitality and administrative flexibility shaped the construction of new programs and courses. Committed teachers mentored the less experienced.

Tom learned much from colleagues as he experimented toward an effective pedagogy for a mass university. His joint appointment meant he had to stretch his intellectual range and his tricks of delivery. Team teaching in humanities offered gifted faculty, models, and mentors for classroom work. Tom loved teaching: the performance and the interactions with students. His pedagogy set the model for his writing and talks, infusing all his public work with drama and the unexpected. In those expansive years, York University was also liberal with research leaves and sometimes funding to help young faculty move ahead on their scholarship.

In their second year in Toronto, the Cohens moved onto York's new, suburban campus, where Tom accepted a supplementary post as senior tutor at Vanier College, one of the school's undergraduate colleges. This office had many parts. Tom became the resident overseer of dorm life, director of two dozen freshman seminars, and organizer with the students of varied extracurricular cultural events. The

Cohen apartment hosted some of these, including a feisty talk by a young Margaret Atwood and a concert of South Indian music. Resident and unofficial assistant to the senior tutor, Libby spent much time on the York campus, working as a teaching assistant (TA) and learning to teach among engaged faculty colleagues.

Meanwhile, for Libby, the move to Canada also offered an inviting professional opportunity: to move her PhD studies from a very familiar university with a dearth of like-minded faculty to the University of Toronto, where the recently organized Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies provided a multidisciplinary forum for studies in the period. Even better, at the University of Toronto in 1969, a new professor of French history, Natalie Zemon Davis, although not yet internationally famous, had begun to explore the study of women in early modern Europe. Burgeoning with sudden energy alongside second-wave feminism, the field of women's history was new and very exciting. After a year of course work, Libby began research for a thesis on young women and their socialization in early modern France.

It was a heady moment to launch a PhD in women's history. A great swell of enthusiasm and mutual support enveloped women academics—at the university and also at wide-reaching conferences that were crucial to the new field and to Libby's formation as an historian. From the mid-1970s, the triennial Berkshire Conference on the History of Women was a central hub. In the 1990s, the early modernists began to convene at Attending to Early Modern Women and the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women.

In addition, at the University of Toronto Libby was invited to be one of three TAs for a new full-year course, Topics in the History of Women from the 15th to the 20th Centuries, created from scratch by Natalie Davis and her close colleague, an Americanist, Jill Ker Conway. (Conway became the first female president of Smith College in 1975.) Finding materials for such a course was a major enterprise. Following the two faculty members' areas of expertise, the focus was on Europe for the earlier centuries and the U.S. for the 19th and 20th. In the absence of textbooks or printed collections of primary sources, the course syllabus drew on selections from long, mimeographed bibliographies, prepared and circulated by Davis and Conway, and excerpts of primary documents in varying typefaces. The Canadianist TA, Veronica Strong-Boag, later a prominent historian of women, prepared a supplementary bibliography for Canada. From this deeply collegial experience, Libby not only learned content and ideas about presentation but also enjoyed attentive mentoring by the course directors in how to be a female academic.

Natalie Davis left the University of Toronto in Libby's third year to teach at the University of California at Berkeley, and then she moved to Princeton University for the remainder of her influential career. Davis still served as an examiner at Libby's dissertation defense and, until her death in 2023, remained a supportive, stimulating mentor. Natalie and Chandler Davis, with a young marriage formed at Harvard and three children, offered an encouraging model for a two-career academic family.

The busy first Toronto years taught Tom and Libby much about becoming professional historians and teachers within a national culture new to them. The general social and intellectual environment of Toronto in the 1970s helped both Cohens initiate their academic careers. The city—and the whole of Canada—were politically lively, filled with civic idealism and cultural ferment in the wake of the 1967 Centennial. Pierre Trudeau brought the country intellectual flair.

Just as the Cohens set up house in Toronto, a civic protest movement that would beat back a planned expressway erupted in the city. They promptly joined the committee that steered the agitation. As senior tutor, Tom connected his suburban students in Vanier College to this downtown affray as an active part of their learning. For both Cohens, that experience launched a pattern of civic engagement. The end of the decade saw Tom on the board of the city's new zoo, with an education portfolio to bring in experts for public talks.

At the same time, Toronto's several universities provided a matrix for rich conversations across institutions in which early modern European social and cultural histories were central. An array of eminent visiting scholars in the field provoked debates: during the Cohens' early years, notable were several leading French historians associated with the Annales school and Lawrence Stone from Princeton. The Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium regularly brought speakers from across the city and the wider region. (Later, for many years Libby sat on steering committees for TRRC.)

Less formal, but very stimulating were multidisciplinary working groups that met in people's homes. A Social History Group, founded by the pioneering historical sociologist Charles Tilly and his social historian wife, Louise, who left for the University of Michigan before the Cohens arrived, was sustained by Natalie Davis and later by others. The rotating seminar shared work-in-progress, debated methodologies, and built alliances. Not only Tom but also Libby, although a grad student, took part. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, both belonged to a long-running informal group that linked historians and anthropologists.

The 1970s also saw a string of professional and personal milestones for the Cohens. They spent 1972-1973 in Paris for Libby's dissertation research, while Tom took leave to finish writing his quantitative PhD thesis. In 1974, he collected his (belated) degree from Harvard. Youthfully tolerant, York was willing to tenure him in 1976 for his teaching and for scholarly promise, despite his having few publications.

Meanwhile, Libby slowly produced thesis chapters. Although a student at the University of Toronto, she mostly taught part-time at York, where new graduate programs were only beginning to produce TAs. CUPE 3903, an assertive union for TAs and contract faculty, formed at York at this time. A notable exception for Libby's teaching appeared at the University of Toronto in 1974-1975. With another graduate student, she was asked to teach the women's history course, now entitled Society and the Sexes, after both Natalie Davis and Jill Conway had left the university.

In the fall of 1976, Libby delivered a first child. With Tom conveniently on sabbatical, they learned baby care together. Libby received her PhD in 1978 and had a second child in 1979. Though it was a stretch, the flexibility of academic schedules allowed the two parents to oversee most of the kids' time, both as toddlers and, once they were older, after school.

While Tom and, later, Libby were cross-appointed to the departments of history and humanities at York University, the history department was particularly crucial to their careers. It had a large faculty and a curriculum that ranged from ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome to 20th-century Canada, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The department taught multitudes of undergrads, for several years second only to the University of California at Los Angeles for the largest numbers of majors in North America.

While some fractiousness riled the department's earlier decades, in the mid-1980s internal politics became less divisive. Since then, the history department has cultivated a strong esprit de corps and aimed, with general success, to support its members' teaching and research. The local backing was very welcome for Tom and Libby, and they felt loyalty to their community of colleagues.

Tom's job at York included regular year-long sabbaticals, a benefit that favored European research. For his second, in 1983-1984, the family, now with two young children, set off again for Rome. With the older in Italian primary school and the other in daycare (*asilo*), mornings were free for both parents to pursue their scholarship. Long at work at turning his Jesuit thesis into a book, Tom planned to persevere at that.

Libby, meanwhile, had new plans. Having put aside her study of French women, she wanted to pursue early modern women and make use of Roman archives. Looking for market women in papal Rome, she set out to explore the criminal court records suggested by a historian friend who knew the city well. Tom volunteered to join her for a few days at the Archivio di Stato di Roma, centrally located at the old university building, to help her get started. Led by curiosity, here came another unplanned, unconventional career move. Although Libby never found market women, these little-exploited trial records proved a gold mine for social and cultural history of a different kind. Both Cohens were hooked.

Wisely or not, neither of them—Tom tenured, Libby independent of a full-time job—felt pressure to deliver scholarly products according to an institutional schedule. Neither of them published their dissertations as books. But the subsequent four decades of scholarship, tracing through the Roman trials many sorts of people—soldiers, lutemakers, confectioners, peasants, servants, and prostitutes—and a medley of themes—social practices and rituals, gender and family, violence, orality, magic, and value systems—made their international careers.

This terrain was altogether new for both Cohens, and they lacked training specifically as Italian historians. Yet they had several intellectual and professional assets as well as the support of home-based collaboration with one another. Early modern Europe as offered in the curricula of North American universities

typically involved teaching across many national settings. In addition, studies in the Renaissance and early modern centuries were maturing through an interdisciplinary approach that linked literature, art, music, and history.

In particular, the Toronto experience greatly enriched the Cohens' historical education and provided models of social history that, moving beyond numbers, incorporated anthropology and lively narrative. Although she was teaching in the United States, Natalie Davis remained a presence in Toronto. Her habits of close reading and her eye for stories left a strong impression on Tom and Libby, among many scholars.

Engaging the reservoir of Roman criminal trial records, Tom and Libby blundered into a space that was relatively empty of scholars. Earlier scholarship consulted this vast corpus only occasionally in search of famous people or important incidents. Among many series of documents from the Governor's criminal court, the trials (*processi*) are especially rich for social and cultural history because they transcribe close to verbatim the interrogations of both suspects and other witnesses. The speakers include many men and women of lower social rank, often illiterate, and their testimonies depict not only all sorts of criminal, violent, or deceptive acts, but also everyday behavior peripheral to the offenses.

Nevertheless, these precious manuscript papers are difficult to read. The testimonies, constructed by judicial procedures, appear as the exchanges of questions in formulaic Latin with the answers in lively, somewhat archaic Italian. The handwriting is variably legible, and the paper often ink-stained or fragile. Tom and Libby set out to teach themselves how to read these documents, which required patient transcription, fussy decoding, and methodical sifting of intricate legal procedures. It was certainly easier to share the learning, and, like reading detective stories, it was always fun. It took years, however, to become adept.

The huge corpus is also challenging to navigate. There are hundreds of large, leather-bound volumes—most of them several hundred folios each and some with as many as 1200, the equivalent of 2400 pages. At first, Tom and Libby responded somewhat haphazardly—to both legibility and clues about events or the kinds of people that caught their interest. Libby, for example, looked for women. They were also guided by old-fashioned, handwritten archival inventories. Tom opened the first volume, which covered the 16th century, while Libby started with the next, from 1600-1620. To this day, that impromptu decision governs the chronology on which each of them focuses. More generally, curiosity, practicality, and hunch rather than a concerted research program, shaped their inquiries.

The next step lay in reconstructing historical meanings from criminal trials. A first task was to figure out what—maybe—was going on. A second stage was to identify the players in their social contexts and then to look for patterns and motives in their behavior. The Cohens' goal of telling the stories of unknown individuals, however, did not fit much of the established practice for the social history of early modern Rome. Traditional historiography, based in notarial registers, contracts, and institutional paperwork, was uneasy about trials as sources. Although

a highly systematic process of judicial truth-making generated these accounts, the speakers often lacked status and education, and they easily might have been lying. Furthermore, some scholars, devotees of Renaissance high culture, were simply baffled about why they should slum among the banalities of mere ordinary lives.

Tom's sabbatical in 1991-1992, with teenaged children in Italian schools, consolidated the new research. Supported by his Rome Prize fellowship from the American Academy in Rome, the year was rich in new contacts and experiences for the whole family. It was especially useful for intellectual exchanges with archeologists and historians of art and architecture. Those interactions deepened the Cohens' feel for the physical city that early modern Romans occupied. The better they understood the surroundings, the more sense they could make of the past lives under study.

The first major product of their trials research, a book entitled *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials Before the Papal Magistrates* (E. Cohen & T. Cohen, 1993), was a joint effort. Over the years, they have written together intermittently. The process varies, but the final texts are always a product of drafting and redrafting, passing the keyboard back and forth. Collaborative writing—as with this essay—highlights the beneficial complementarities in their professional strengths and foci of attention. Relying on patience and generosity, the writing process is slow, but the results usually please their readers.

Words and Deeds is—perhaps no surprise!—not a typical, archive-based monograph. Instead, it presents in careful English translation the records of eight trials involving different cultural themes and human situations, complemented by an introduction to the judicial system and how to read trials and, for each one, by a short essay on the social contexts, transactions, and values. The writing itself often has a playful streak. For one trial the Cohens applied game theory to a love intrigue; for another they introduced the prosecution of a sacrilegious peasant play in an essay in the form of a modern playbill. In addition to showcasing the vitality of such documents, they sought to help both teachers and students explore a very foreign world in open, inquiring ways.

Words and Deeds garnered mixed reviews. Some denied the book's scholarly authenticity. From London, the *Times Literary Supplement* sniffed that it was quite suitable for "provincial" students. Many students and professors have enjoyed it, though, and it continues to be taught in anglophone classrooms internationally three decades later.

Later, what the Cohens wrote together was often synthetic, several articles and most notably a second, quite different book. In 1998, they were invited to prepare a volume on Renaissance Italy for Greenwood Press' daily-life series. While such books are often middle-brow compendia on the everyday details of life, the Cohens aimed higher, building a vision of how a whole social world transacted, quarreled, and cohered. Published in 2001 with a second edition in 2019, their anthropologically shaped overview on social transactions and mental and material culture serves a wide spectrum of readers and is frequently cited by students and scholars (E. Cohen & T. Cohen, 2019).

Besides jointly publishing these two books, Tom and Libby deliberately continued to craft independent professional personae. Throughout the decades, Tom remained a keen teacher. Thriving on interactions with students, he always offered a first-year undergraduate course in humanities and sometimes one in history. The history courses sometimes involved experiential exercises in recreating premodern societies, such as the saga world of medieval Iceland. After 2000, from time to time Tom added graduate courses and supervision to the mix. In 2004, he was promoted to full professor.

From the 1990s, as a scholar Tom was drawn to framing his trial findings as compact microhistories, dramatic stories, often told with a playful eye to the geometries of narrative plots and social dynamics. While several appeared as articles, in 2003 something more developed. Idled from the classroom and office by a months-long York strike, a recurring feature of the university's politics, Tom bundled a collection of unpublished stories into a book, with a title borrowed from Woody Allen, *Love and Death* (T. Cohen, 2004), this time set in Renaissance Italy.

Although it took chances, *Love and Death* did well. Tom modeled his chapters on *New Yorker* short stories; one of them, for example, about a failed wife-poisoning scheme, shaped as an epistolary novelette of plotters' letters. Another essay became a soap opera script, with dialogue lifted from a trial and stage directions that slipped into scholarly commentary. Tom tried this fanciful manuscript on a big trade publisher, which rejected it with stunning speed as "not commercial enough." But the University of Chicago Press, known among academic publishers for its agile marketing, took it on. In due course, the 2004 book won a Marraro Prize for Italian history awarded by the American Historical Association.

From writing his own microhistories full of quirky particularities, Tom's scholarship also moved to engaging this particular historical methodology alongside other practitioners. Beginning in 2014 and continuing, he participated in an informal network of international workshops on microhistory that gathered scholars and students from Canada, Iceland, Hungary, Russia, Germany, and the United States. The network soon began to publish. For one collection that he co-edited, Tom contributed a pithy overview, "The Macrohistory of Microhistory" (T. Cohen, 2017). For the Routledge microhistory book series, he wrote *Roman Tales* (T. Cohen, 2019), which married microhistories from the trials with commentary on how the method worked. Among several book translations on varied topics, Tom translated a microhistory from French for the same Routledge series. He currently is co-editing an ambitious *Handbook of Microhistory* with essays from around the globe.

In parallel with Tom's professional progress, Libby made choices about how best to build a career and a scholarly community of her own. Going back to the 1980s, with young children and a research partnership sited in Toronto, she faced a tightening job market. Her prospects for a full-time appointment were limited, and, even in southern Ontario, most jobs would likely entail a lot of commuting and general strain. A tenure-track position would also start a ticking clock on her scholarly output.

With Tom's job and income secure, Libby chose to continue contract teaching at York University, where her status was protected by the union, CUPE 3903. With the university's growing student body, demand for staffing both in the humanities program and in the department of history remained high. As tutorial instructor and as course director, she could teach in her own fields one or two courses at a time and not teach at all in the summer or when Tom had sabbaticals. Although she was ambivalent about some of the union's strategies, the contract did protect her and other members better than the situations at many other institutions. Besides seniority and pay quite decent by the standards of the time, she also received funding for conference travel and once for a major research trip.

Based on a long history of activity at York, Libby was well-known by the faculty and enjoyed a respected personal standing that rested on more than the union's measures. By 1990, she regularly directed courses both for humanities and history. Although not formally appointed, she was asked to propose and teach a new, full-year course on the history of European women. She was also a fellow of Vanier College, chaired the faculty of arts committee on academic policy and planning, and was a faculty representative to senate.

Alongside a regular, but finite roster of contract teaching, Libby invested part of her time and energy in scholarly research and writing. The work interested her and felt worthwhile. Although support at home was good, it also helped greatly to be part of an enthusiastic wave of historians of women, many of whom themselves knew atypical career timetables or pioneered the role of "independent scholar."

Libby always wrote slowly but began in the 1980s to present at conferences and to publish. A first single-authored paper on young French women (E. Cohen, 1986) appeared in a small Canadian journal. A second article, based on Roman trials, reached more prominent publication by a bizarre route. Libby sent the paper, in English, to a scholar friend in Rome to see what she thought of it. Without asking or telling Libby, the friend sent it to the editors of *Quaderni storici,* a major Italian journal. They must have liked it because it appeared, in Italian translation, a couple years later (E. Cohen, 1986). Libby found out about the publication only when, in a Canadian library, she casually picked up a current issue of the journal to check its contents. A revised English version came out in a collection a few years later (E. Cohen,1991). Together, these tentative steps moved her toward a firmer sense of professional presence and credibility.

In the 1990s and since, Libby has continued to write many articles and chapters about women from the trial records. She has situated gender within a wide variety of themes, including—in rough order of appearance—street life and rituals, honor, prostitution, women's work, urban space and time, oral culture, girlhood, migrants, and also artists. Between 1998-2007, three articles won annual Honorable Mentions from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and Gender.

One direction led Libby into a notably fruitful scholarly conversation with art historians. One day in Rome, a friend took her to see a small exhibition of canvases by Artemisia Gentileschi, a woman baroque painter just then being

rediscovered. The trial record concerning her rape in 1612 by her father's colleague was among those in the volumes that Libby was reading at the archive. Setting out to read the trial carefully, she later wrote an article that sought to historicize the painter's experience of rape. This essay (E. Cohen, 2000) was destined to be the most widely cited piece of Libby's career. Later, she was invited to consult and publish as part of a project on the beginnings of the Roman academy of painters at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts in Washington, DC (E. Cohen, 2009). Recently, this conjunction with art history has led to essays for the catalogues of two European exhibitions focused on biblical stories: Judith and Holofernes (Rome, 2021) and Susanna and the Elders (Cologne, Germany, 2022).

In the mid-1990s, history and humanities jointly nominated Libby for a tenure-track appointment, to be chosen among the long-service contract faculty across the university. The decision to seek a full-time position for her recognized her proven and distinctive contribution, even though in both units, Tom "covered" slots defined similarly by time and space. According to the CUPE union contract at that time, a few permanent appointments were made available each year, and units wishing to win one had to stage a formal process and make a case for their candidate according to standing procedures and departmental criteria for a tenure-track hire.

In a competition in which departments bid against one another on the strengths of their candidate, Libby's fifteen years of independent archival research and published scholarship was crucial. Her cross-appointment as Assistant Professor in History and Humanities came in 1996, promotion to associate professor in 2000, and, after a transfer wholly to history, full professor in 2011. Between 2003 and 2017, she served six years in departmental leadership in history as director of undergraduate studies, department chair, and director of graduate studies.

When Libby received her permanent appointment, she was well known as an independent member of the faculty. Although York did not have a policy that favored spousal hires, it had no problem with couples in the same department. At one point, the history department, then with more than 45 members including cross-appointments, had three couples among its members. Symbolically, perhaps, at department meetings and university social occasions, Libby and Tom usually sat in different places and talked to different people. In colleagues' eyes, they were clearly distinct.

At the turn of the millennium, with their son and daughter now off into worlds of their own, the Cohens' professional lives continued to expand to include friendships and alliances across North America and Europe. In Toronto and elsewhere, they became more involved in graduate teaching and supervision as well as volunteering support for interested students who were not their official responsibilities. They devoted time to the collegial business of scholarship, such as editing and reviewing manuscripts—informally for authors or formally for presses and journals. They often participated in academic conferences and sometimes organized them. Collaboration with other scholars, especially younger ones, and mentoring students were particularly gratifying.

Invitations also led to interesting academic visits abroad. For example, in Finland, as visiting professors at the University of Helsinki (2009), they together taught a short course. At another time, Libby sat on an international panel that assessed the research of the faculty of humanities at the University of Turku (2015). In 2018, they were both visiting professors one spring in Florence at Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. For love of Rome and their research, the Cohens continued to work in the archives most years, usually for a few weeks, as they had elderly parents to assist in Toronto.

In 2019, long past the standard retirement age and eight months before the pandemic struck, both Cohens retired, having, between them, given ninety-one years to York University, Tom 50, Libby 18 on contract, another 23 full-time.

By then, "the Cohens" were something of an institution, "two for the price of one," as one grateful graduate student said at a conference honoring their retirement. Yet, the happy conclusion of this story of two careers—complete with idiosyncrasies and swerves—owes an important part not only to unity or effective collaboration, but also to recognizing and honoring the differences of the two protagonists.

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