
Farewell Hermann Zapf

Hàn Thế Thành

I met Zapf for the first time at a T_EX conference. That time I was too shy to come close and make any conversation. I was impressed how a kind and bright gentleman he was, despite his fame and age. Before that, I only knew the name Hermann Zapf from his typefaces which I used and admired.

Then, through the work on HZ extensions for pdfT_EX I learned more about Hermann Zapf and also had the opportunities to contact him. During testing of the HZ extensions I sent the sample output to him, asking for his opinion. Zapf answered with a letter in his unique style, with beautiful typography, very kind and contented words. I was encouraged by his letter very much; before that I was having doubts if my work makes any sense. Later the faculty asked Zapf whether he would be willing to review my thesis.¹ Zapf accepted. I could only be thankful.

During another T_EX conference in Darmstadt I met Hermann Zapf again, and was lucky enough to have a dinner with him, together with Hans Hagen and Volker Schaa. I forgot that I was having dinner with a legendary person. I was simply enjoying the time being there, for Hermann Zapf was such a pleasant person to be with. It was like being with a wise and kind uncle.

When I read the news that Hermann Zapf passed away, I had an empty feeling. I said to myself, it's an unavoidable ending of a great story. Then slowly after that I realized what a loss it was, and how sad I am.

Farewell Hermann Zapf, we will miss you until we meet again.

¹ Hàn Thế Thành, "Micro-typographic extensions to the T_EX typesetting system", dissertation, Faculty of Informatics, Masaryk University Brno. *TUGboat* 21:4, 2000. <http://tug.org/TUGboat/tb21-4/tb69thanh.pdf>

Remembering Hermann Zapf

Kris Holmes *

Hermann Zapf is admired as the greatest type designer of his era. Vast reams have been written about his work and many more will be written. Now he is gone and I am sad.

I first met Hermann Zapf in 1979, when I studied calligraphy and type design with him in summer courses at RIT. Our acquaintance continued and

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became friendship over the next 36 years. In remembering him now, I want to tell the one story that means the most to me.

The German firm of Dr. Ing. Rudolf Hell, noted for their ultra-high-quality digital scanning, color, and image engraving systems, also invented the first digital typesetting machine, the Digiset. Dr. Hell made several generations of high-quality Digiset machines for the European market from the 1960s to the 1990s.

In 1981 the firm wanted to introduce a new, small Digiset typesetter into the US with original typefaces to showcase its high resolution and quality. My studio partner, Chuck Bigelow, had been retained as their American consultant. Their European head type adviser, Max Caffisch, who had worked with and learned from Jan Tschichold, was impressed by my brush-written Roman caps, which I had learned from Ed Catich and Bob Palladino. I was asked to submit proposals for new typeface designs to be reviewed by Dr. Hell's type review board for possible development and inclusion in Dr. Hell's type library. The review board included Hermann Zapf, who had already designed several original faces for the firm, including Marconi, Edison, and Aurelia, among the very first original typefaces for digital typography.

And so it was that in the fall of 1981 we flew to Basel, Switzerland, for the selection of new type designs. On the morning of the type review board, I nervously entered the room where Hermann Zapf and the other European designers sat. I handed out the type specimens I had laboriously drawn, photocopied, assembled, and prepared by hand. One of those proposals was for a new connecting script design that featured a unique inner hairline and flowing swashes like sarabands in the capitals. I provisionally named it 'Isadora' after the pathbreaking American modern dancer, Isadora Duncan whose graceful vision I admired. Isadora the typeface was a new, original, and daring design. I was afraid it might be too daring.

Each of the European designers scrutinized my samples in silence. One of them, not Hermann, had previously and privately expressed to me his doubts that a "girl" could design an original typeface, and indeed that morning I noticed a sour look on the doubter's face as he pondered my much labored-over Isadora. Yet, before the doubter could say a word, Hermann Zapf spoke instead, saying: "Yes, this is highest quality, without question. We will take it." Hermann put down my sample and nodded to me approvingly. The other designers looked at Hermann, looked at me, then looked at Hermann again and nodded their heads in obedient agreement. Isadora was accepted unanimously.

And so it was with the approving words of the great and persuasive Hermann Zapf, followed by those obedient nods from the others, including the doubter, that my life as an original typeface designer began in earnest. Dr. Hell eventually merged with Linotype, and the typeface Isadora was acquired by ITC. It is still a popular typeface today, more than 30 years later. Hermann was right.

A few weeks after that fateful meeting, a package arrived in the mail for me. It was a copy of *Feder Und Stichel* ('Pen and Graver'), Zapf's superb calligraphy engraved by August Rosenberger and printed at the Stempel type foundry. Hermann Zapf had inscribed it to me. That rare book is still my most prized possession. It was his generous way of honoring my beginning as an original designer. He certainly knew from the beautiful type designs of his wonderful, talented wife, Gudrun, that a girl could design original typefaces. I have the fondest memories of Hermann Zapf over all the years I knew him. I sent him often happy but occasionally despairing letters over the years, which he always, always answered with kind guidance.

Everyone knows what a great designer Hermann Zapf was. But he was also a generous mentor, a brilliant mind, a stunning penman and a brave fighter for original design.

I loved that guy.

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Hermann Zapf and his calligraphy and type design classes at RIT, summer 1979. Zapf stands in bright light, while the rest of us are in darkness. I am in the blue dress, standing above the kneeling man in sunglasses (Ned Bunnell). Behind and to my left is Jerry Kelly, talented calligrapher, book designer, and author of *About More Alphabets*, covering Zapf's most recent type designs. Behind and to my right is Chuck Bigelow, my long-time studio partner and co-designer of the Lucida fonts. On the far left, the kneeling woman is the late Dorothy Dehn, accomplished calligrapher and teacher.



I watch Zapf closely. So does Julian Waters at lower left.



With Hermann as jurors at the Linotype Arabic Type contest, 2005.



The same two of us, more light, more joking, more motion blur.