I met up with Bob Wells the other day. Where? Outside the SLU library of course, where we chatted for twenty minutes. As a former student of Bob’s in the 1960s and a lifelong admirer of his dedication to so many fields, there is always lots to talk about.

Whether the subject is New York State and local government and history, the village of Canton to which he has contributed selflessly for decades, most recently as its mayor for three terms, the United Nations or the Akwasasne Mohawks of northern New York, the breadth of his interests has always left me a little in awe...but then students should be a little in awe of their professors. That awe never made him feel like a distant figure, however. He is always ready with a booming hello, but be prepared for the conversation to turn instantly to politics, government, Native American affairs and always, Canton politics and issues. I don’t believe I have ever discussed the weather with Bob Wells.

My admiration for anyone willing to step into the mayorship of a village, that cauldron of local government, knows no bounds. It is often a thankless job. People call you at home to rant and rave about dogcatchers, potholes, snow removal, zoning restrictions and sewer lines. Endless board meetings, sudden catastrophes like the ice storm of 1998 and feuding neighbors all go into the mix.

When I spoke to Bob shortly after he had retired from SLU, he spoke about his passion to finally have time to write a book on the history of the Akwasasne Indians. It was clearly something close to his heart. As his student, I was part of his program, Operation Kenyengehaga, which sent students to the reservation to tutor native children. It was an eye opening experience for me, though it seemed every trip that first winter was made in a raging blizzard. I thought it was an anomaly, but Susan Ward, recently retired English teacher at SLU, told me she had the same experience in her travels to the reservation.

But the book had to go on hold. Canton called and Bob answered by becoming mayor. Despite his devotion to the village, I think it must not have been an easy decision, because of his desire to write. A glance at some of his earlier publications puts the breadth of his interests in true perspective: Law Values and the Environment (1996), Native American Resurgence and Renewal (1994), Peace by Pieces—United Nations Agencies and Their Roles (1991). Later this year, he will publish a text entitled New York State Government in a Nutshell, A Citizen’s Primer. and I’ve eagerly read Bob’s editorials in area papers on political and legal matters.

But the new book is in the works. It will be the long delayed project on the history and politics of the Akwasasne Mohawks from 1969-1995. Bob has spent more than forty years working with and studying the Akwasasne, going all the way back to my tutoring at the reservation in 1969. I have no doubt it will prove to be a fascinating, informative and personal book.
What then? With Bob’s insatiable energy and curiosity, we can only await the answer. Maybe after the Akwasasne history, he’ll wade back into politics. I hear they will soon be looking for a Mayor in New York City.