



Part of the Team

When Sukey called me on the morning Peter died I felt my heart break, for Sukey, his children, and for myself. I would never speak with him again. I had come to cherish the once-or-twice a month catch-up calls that would start with a run down of how our respective spouses and kids were doing...mostly concerning their health and happiness. From there we would exchange news of the department. In this, he was far better versed than I. Even though I lived closer, he kept involved with the doings at Park Hall. How could he not? He would pass on whatever update there was. After all, we were still part of the UB Philosophy Department Team!

When he hired me in 1990, he told me that he had high hopes for the job I would do. He saw my background as a native-born Hungarian, English major, teacher, toymaker, poet and private school administrator as a perfect fit for the diverse department he nurtured. And he strongly believed that to do the job well, I would need to be steeped in the history and culture of the department and the vision he had for its future. The fact that I knew little about formal philosophy was of little consequence to him.

The job description of Assistant to the Chair evolved during my first few months. Of course, Peter felt the routine administrative duties were certainly essential but not the "heart" of the job.

He was adamant about preserving the history of the department, developing a relationship with the people in the University Archives. He faithfully delivered everything relevant to the department for cataloguing and preservation. And he gave me material from the Archives to read to get a historical perspective.

He would often tell me stories, usually prefaced by "As I have told you..." or "As you well know..." and of course all I could do was nod in assent, although usually he hadn't or I didn't...but the stories always increased my depth of understanding of the Philosophy Department or rather those that made it what it was, not just the title of a generic place but the unique people who gave the place its character and who would shape its direction.

What was truly important to him, was that Peter, I, Judy and Eileen would become a team working together to create, maintain and nourish an atmosphere of community, possibility and diversity.

He tackled everything, including my initiation into the department, with great enthusiasm. He loved politics, in the classical sense, the process by which groups make decisions. He saw the best in people, notwithstanding their faults and he would point out to me that the very faults I would see, grew out of their strengths and were inevitably linked. Because he always saw our potential, we always wanted to live up to that. He constantly looked for ways to bring people together. He always sought to give people recognition for their accomplishments.

Team Hare, including Judy, Eileen and me, would brainstorm about how to put together the perfect event. Whether it was the welcoming party for new students, the Steinberg Prize event, a conference, the Hourani Lecture series, our holiday party, a special award or retirement party, each occasion had to be different and best suited to those it honored. One professor required an irreverent roast, while another needed to be honored with quiet dignity. The laying of a new tile floor in Baldy Hall, something Judy labored to acquire for years, demanded a celebration replete with invitation to the dean, food, music and plaque!

Peter wanted things done right; the venue, the food, the program had to be tailored to the occasion. Not as a perfectionist for detail (although his skills as an editor extended to other areas) but as someone sensitive to the personalities and needs of those with whom he worked. Some things didn't pan out. The student coffee and donut breakfasts once a week, for instance didn't bring many students but did add many inches to my waist.. But mostly all the events were a success and created a very special atmosphere and great memories.

The nousletter was another extension of his commitment to creating community within the department. Right before I was hired, the first volume of the nousletter appeared. It was the skeletal beginning of a much grander project he envisioned. It was just a couple of pages long and produced in - house.

With a few years of collaboration and much help from Eileen artistically and Judy disciplinarily hounding faculty and students for copy, we produced printed nousletters with a recognizable icon cover , numerous regular features including cartoons, poems and surprisingly meaty articles that folks who had moved on from the department looked forward to receiving.

Visiting Professors, coming from all parts of the world, were another of Team Hare's delightful challenges. Often we had to smooth out visa problems, housing problems, finance problems, language problems, lecture attendance problems. The visitor needed to be honored with dinners and get-togethers and be made to feel part of the departmental family. Peter took great joy in showing them around Western New York and also great pleasure in the diversity of thought and experience they brought to us. It was almost always a win-win situation.

I immediately liked Peter from the moment I met him. His bowtie, his genuineness, his exuberance. In the intervening years, I have cherished, I will remember and will terribly miss, his continuing friendship, democratic nature, his inclusiveness, his sense of fairness, of always trying to do the right thing, his tolerance and patience (he would often say he could be quite fierce, but I never saw an occasion of that), his loyalty, his innate joyfulness and fun, and his love of family, of people, and of life.

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