

## **Harold Richman, The Builder**

Joel Fleishman

Marlene, Robert, and Andrew, and all members of Harold's extended family of kin and friends, we all extend our heartfelt condolences on the death of Harold Richman, a human being who was a genuinely good and gentle human being, a devoted husband and father, a scholar and policy activist who was consumed by service to those in need, and a master builder who poured his life into building institutions that would live after him and continue for all time to help realize the goals that animated his life and career.

What does it take to build anything? 1) VISION, 2) PASSION, 3) LEADERSHIP  
4) HIGH CRAFTSMANSHIP, 5) AN UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT, AND 6) AN EYE FOR TALENT.

1) The VISION to imagine what the world lacks, what needs to be built. As Robert F. Kennedy often said, paraphrasing George Bernard Shaw in *Back to Methuselah*: "Other people see things as they are and ask 'why?' but I DREAM of things that never were and ask 'why not?'" Harold Richman was that kind of dreamer, that kind of prophet who not only dreamed but who transformed his dreams into his own self-fulfilling prophecies. As my and Harold's friend and colleague Professor Lawrence Aber wrote me: "Harold envisioned a better world in which governments and universities worked together more effectively to identify, deliver and improve services and policies for society's neediest children. This vision was rooted in his early work in his beloved Chicago and extended over time to our nation and the globe."

2) The PASSION to build something BECAUSE society desperately needs it and no one else has yet had the vision or gumption to build it. As all of you who ever dealt with Harold know, his passion for serving children burned in his heart and shined in his eyes. Who could possibly resist his zeal for bettering the lives of the most vulnerable?

3) The willingness, the talents, and the energy to assume LEADERSHIP and to pour one's life into the realization of one's vision. His reputation for leadership won him a White House Fellowship, and it was his continuing exercise of leadership that enabled him to build the many institutions which exist because of him. That leadership brought into being many collaborations between communities and Chapin Hall, between foundations and nonprofits, and among government at all levels on the one hand and universities, foundations and nonprofits on the other. Leadership, augmented by diplomacy and tact, is indispensable in forging collaborations, and, but for Harold those collaborations would never have come into being.

4) HIGH CRAFTSMANSHIP—an eye for and commitment to detail, and with Harold, craftsmanship in assuring that policy agendas were based on reliable empirical data of high quality. The creation of major databases on foster care in some 22 states and 2 counties, as of now, provided the infrastructure on which much of Chapin Hall’s policy research was done, but that is just one of the collections of data that inform the policy papers and policy advocacy which Harold is responsible for bringing into being.

5) A keen sense of the CONTEXT in which one intends to build. What an unerring, active sense of context—the environment in which one wishes to build anything—Harold possessed! For Harold, his due diligence about context meant deep engagement in the communities in which children and their families lived, extensive, continuing engagement with the public officials and community activists working in those communities, AND deep engagement with the University of Chicago, which provided his teaching, research, and entrepreneurial base for 40 years. In other words, in all his work, he was THE bridge between the university and the surrounding community, between the people who worked in the university and those who lived their lives in the surrounding and adjacent communities, between the world of objective, empirical data generation and the world of action with which those data dealt, and between the world of government and the world of foundations and nonprofit organizations active in shaping the policies and practices of the fields in which he was a builder.

6) And a eye for TALENT, the discernment to choose the people to attract to his vision and to engage them as his fellow builders. The size and strength of Chapin Hall attest to Harold’s instinct for talent of the highest quality. What a talent scout he was! It was Harold who first told me, in the early 1990s about this remarkable Chicagoan Barack Obama. My, was Harold prescient about talent. Again, as Professor Aber wrote me: “Harold recruited hundreds (and probably thousands) of us to join him to pursue this vision. Our own continuing work, inspired and sustained by Harold's life and example, is one of his enduring gifts to the world he loved so much.”

And all of these talents, and more, enabled him to build and build!

He built the School of Social Service Administration to new heights as its dean, starting in 1969, and, parenthetically, when he was the youngest named professor on the University of Chicago faculty. And a year before becoming dean, he founded the SSA’s Washington-based Center for the Study of Welfare Policy, which continues to this day as an independent entity with a wider mission under the name of the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Moreover, what is now the University of Chicago’s Harris School of Public Policy, of which Harold was a very distinguished professor, was invented by the Committee on Public Policy Studies, of which Harold served as founding chair. That Committee began awarding degrees in 1974. It was in that role that I first came to know and admire Harold 35 years ago!

And of course, there is Chapin Hall. He not only transformed the 120-year-old Chapin Hall Asylum for Half-Orphans on the board of which he served (AND THANK GOD HE RENAMED IT) into what is now the Chapin Hall Center for Children, which aims at benefiting ALL children, especially but not only those at risk, and he pioneered the establishment of similar research/policy/action tanks on children and families in many other countries, including Ireland, Israel, Jordan and South Africa. It was Harold who designed those centers and for many years served as principal advisor to all of them, helped them raise money to get going and survive, and even took on the positions of Board Chair of the ones in Israel and South Africa. Moreover, he linked those international centers into a network with Chapin Hall at its center, and that network will help carry on the work that was the center of Harold's professional life. But for Harold, there would not be such institutions benefiting children now functioning in those countries, just as, but for Harold, Chapin Hall would not be the towering lighthouse for public policy for children that he made it into. Millions of children the world over who are now benefiting from Harold's passion for their welfare and the practical initiatives he instituted to improve it are here with us in spirit in this synagogue today.

What was the secret of Harold's success? He instinctively knew how to build institutions across often impermeable boundaries. His genius produced what I regard as the highest quality model of university-situated, evidence-based public policy research and action institutions in the U.S., perhaps in the whole world. He knew that policy is worth nothing if not based in reliable objective data, and he committed himself to nothing less than the highest quality. And he knew that neither reliable data nor sound policy could be generated without intimate engagement with the communities being studied and without ongoing, thorough involvement of policy advocates and government officials. It was the credibility he earned with government officials that helped break down the walls between agencies and gave them the confidence in him to enable their data on their respective child welfare services to be shared across agencies. Because of the strength of Chapin Hall's base in the University of Chicago and its wide roots throughout both the City of Chicago and the other communities in which it works, it has attracted the engagement of government officials and policy practitioners in the policy development and improvement initiatives of Chapin Hall, and thereby earned the respect of policy scholars the world over. It is that combination of data-rich analysis, carefully considered theory, and thoroughgoing practitioner involvement that enable Chapin Hall, along with the other institutions to which Harold has given birth, to have the base of empirical data required to take the long-run view, to anticipate what the child policy agenda will be 5 years ahead. As Harold said in a talk that is on the Chapin Hall website, "Our job is to be ready with the policy formulations when the public realizes that the problems are there and wants to do something to solve them."

Where vulnerable children and their families were concerned, Harold was always at the ready. And, thanks to Harold, so are the many institutions into which he bred the praiseworthy, wise values that animated him and yielded so much benefit to society.

“Is there not a certain satisfaction in the fact that natural limits are set to the life of the individual, so that at its conclusion it may appear as a work of art?”

Einstein, La Pensee, 1947  
Out of My Later Years, 231

Harold, your life has been a sublime work of art, and your teaching will now go on and on and on!

“The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord.”

Job 1:21