

Harold as Teacher

Sonny Garg

As I struggled the other night trying to figure out how you eulogize someone who most likely would have been annoyed and certainly embarrassed by all the attention being paid to him today, I reached out to Harold's dear friend Marjorie Benton for her thoughts and reflections.

As always, Marjorie eloquently articulated what most of us know and feel – that Harold made her a better person, that he took some of the rough “Irish” edges off her and that he understood the meaning of friendship like nobody else.

Throughout our conversation, I was reminded of Oliver Wendell Holmes's quote: ““I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.”

Unlike the rest of us, Harold Richman seems to have been born on the other side of complexity ... you can see him sitting over there sipping hot water, smiling that Cheshire-cat smile, occasionally sneaking some chocolate. Fortunately for us and I know for me, Harold dedicated himself to helping the rest of us find our path to the other side of complexity.

When I met Harold some twenty years ago during my 4th year of college – and note I said 4th year and not senior year, which tells you something about my extended stay at the university – one professor had referred to me as “a punk” and another as “the most un-academic student he had ever had” – I also had just about as many incompletes as grades on my transcript. I was definitely drowning in simplicity this side of complexity. But it was in his class on US Social Policy that I experienced Harold's magic.

As in other forums, Harold was unassuming in the classroom, saying very little, asking more questions than providing answers, being, as was written on his Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, “a peer and instructor at the same time”.

Through this process, we as a class somehow always arrived collectively at a place that had a floor that always seemed higher than the ceiling we would have constructed on our own.

In that classroom and over the past two decades, I have come to understand two truths that Harold personified: first, that life, to steal from John Gardner, is a “great opportunity, brilliantly disguised as an insoluble problem” and second, that you can't get to the other side of complexity alone but only with others.

For my entire adult life, Harold has been my companion on that road to simplicity, thru my first job, graduate school, marriage, children and now, death. As with so many others, I love Harold and will miss him terribly.

But as I look around this room, I see the beauty of Harold Richman ... he contributed to a world that was not blinded or dependent on his light but one where infinitely more lights shined and more paths lit than otherwise would have. That is his legacy and that is our charge.