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In Memoriam: David P. Leonard

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The poet Rainer Maria Rilke says, ‘love . . . consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other.’ That is the kind of love my friend . . . offered. He never tried to invade my awful inwardness with false comfort or advice; he simply stood on its boundaries, modeling the respect for me and my journey—and the courage to let it be—that I needed”⁹

Reading the David stories posted by so many people on the Loyola tribute blog, I am struck again by the depth and breadth of the respect and love expressed for David. Our stories remind us that the loss of David is a very great loss—yet in our stories David’s spirit lives on.

*[A] billion stars go spinning through the night,
Blazing high above your head.
But in you is the presence that
Will be, when all the stars are dead.*¹⁰

*Professor Marcy Strauss*¹¹

David Leonard was my colleague and my friend. It is his role as a friend—David Leonard the person, not the esteemed scholar, teacher and Dean—where I want to focus my comments.

My friendship with David blossomed largely as a result of a few “business” trips to Las Vegas that I took once a year for the last few years with David and Victor Gold. Well, Victor went on business, David and I sacrificed ourselves to go along so Victor wouldn’t be lonely! Away from Loyola Law school—over dinners, at shows, and yes, hunched over 25-cent poker machines, here’s what I learned about David the person.

9. PARKER J. PALMER, LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK 64 (2000) (citation omitted).

10. *Buddha in Glory*, in AHEAD OF ALL PARTING: THE SELECTED POETRY AND PROSE OF RAINER MARIA RILKE 75 (Stephen Mitchell ed., 1995).

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First, David had a marvelous, mischievous sense of humor. He loved puns, he loved jokes, he loved to laugh and to make others laugh. On one Vegas trip, he introduced me to Monty Python humor. The show was enjoyable, but all the more so because I was sitting next to David, listening to him laughing and enjoying it so very much. Being with him and Victor was guaranteed to keep one smiling. The last time David made me laugh—at a time when I most needed it—was during the days following his death. I was in shock, missing him already, and searching the Internet for anything I could read about him, for any pictures of him. And I found that he had a Facebook page. And on his Facebook page, a student had posted a picture of him from the December 2009 swearing in ceremony which David had officiated. By this time, he looked gaunt and bald. He was obviously suffering yet he wouldn't have missed it for the world. And under the picture the student had posted, David had written a comment. He graciously thanked the student who had posted his picture and said: "I never thought I'd have less hair than Victor Gold." I had to laugh out loud—my first smile in many days, courtesy of David Leonard.

Second, David was humble. Of course, he had a lot of things he could be (and justifiably act) arrogant about. But he didn't. He didn't brag about his son at MIT, or his son the PhD. Now don't get me wrong—no father was more proud of his children and their accomplishments. But it wasn't in David's nature to talk that way. If you asked him, he'd be thrilled to tell you about them—and not just their academic achievements. He knew the measure of a person went beyond those labels. Nor did David trumpet his own successes. I never knew until his funeral really, the extent of his professional achievements—he just did not grandstand.

Third, David was a tremendously caring person. He thought of others all the time, even when it would have been understandable to be somewhat self-involved. I don't know if I can say there wasn't a selfish bone in his body. I do know I can say that if there was one, I never saw it. An example: a few months ago at a party, when David was ailing, I had a conversation with David and his wonderful wife, Susan. Susan and I shared a mutual dislike and fear of flying. She mentioned that a book had helped her a bit, and kindly offered to lend it to me. The next day, David appeared in my office, book in

hand. Now this may seem a little thing, but I didn't look at it that way. A man with a great deal on his mind—with his own mortality facing him, never forgot others and their needs. It would have been easy to let that conversation slip, to be preoccupied with his own issues. But that wouldn't have been David.

Fourth, David was kind. Of course, this usually goes hand in hand with caring, but it doesn't have to. People can care and not take the extra step to practice acts of kindness. Not David. All of us on the faculty and staff, as well as the students at Loyola, have memories of David's kindness. He was usually the first person to greet a visiting professor here at the school who might otherwise be lonely. He showed immense kindness and compassion towards those on the faculty who were ill. He always reached out to those persons with love—sharing war stories about fighting disease or simply checking and seeing how they were and letting them know that he was thinking of them. He took immeasurable time with students struggling to understand evidence. David was a truly kind soul.

Fifth, David was an optimist. David looked on the bright side, even when things may have seemed most gloomy and dark. He believed in good things happening, he believed in hope. Perhaps the best example of this was the email Victor and I invariably would receive before our Vegas trips, discussing how we each would get to Vegas, when we would meet up and how long we'd stay and so forth. David would always end with some comment like this: And of course, we will all fly home on a private jet based on his winnings! He was an optimist.

Finally, David was tenacious. He was a fighter. He fought for justice, he fought for what he thought was right in faculty meetings in a way that never seemed divisive or derisive. David was the EF Hutton of faculty meetings—when David talked, we all listened. But most of all, David fought to live. That is why his death was such a shock. Even though I knew he was terminal, I still expected him to work a miracle—to turn the corner like he had done so many times before. No matter that the odds were even worse than that poker machine, he tried everything humanly possible to extend his time with his wife, Susan, and his children, Matt and Adam, as well as with his friends here at Loyola. He researched treatments, he took experimental drugs because he was going to fight until the end. That

was the way David was. And we are grateful for every extra minute that his fighting spirit likely gave us. David set a shining example to all of us about how to live and how to die.

David never won a jackpot in Vegas. But he did in life. He had a wonderful wife, two super kids, and colleagues who loved him and saw in him all that was good. We all won the jackpot when David spent over twenty years as a beloved member of our Loyola family. I will aspire to be more like him the rest of my life.

*Professor Georgene M. Vairo*¹²

A Tribute to a Wonderful Human Being

We all knew his time was coming. Although he came to school every day, sat in on faculty candidate presentations, and continued to do his job, David was beginning to fade from us. It was just a matter of time. And, his time did come, February 10, 2010. Two days later, a blog was started to provide his students, colleagues and friends a place to remember his gentle soul. When preparing this tribute, I checked the blog again. There were posts by his faculty colleagues as well as members of the Loyola staff. Having been David's colleague, I expected the outpouring of love and respect conveyed in these posts. I also expected similar sentiments to be expressed by his students. We all knew what a great teacher he was. But David obviously touched all of his students in ways that he touched me and my colleagues. There were countless entries from his students.

Words like compassion, humor, kindness, and humility all found their way into these posts on David's memorial blog. I would like to add another: inspiration. David inspired me, and from what one can see in the posts by his students, he inspired countless Loyola graduates. And, his inspiring touch made me, and I am confident anyone whom he touched, to become a better human being.

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