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Remembrances of George R. Seaman, by Andrew Plaut

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Dear Evie,

About fifteen years ago George [alav ha'Shalom] came to consult me for a relatively minor medical problem. Later, I walked with him to the clinic secretary's desk, chatting amiably about one thing or another. Ahead of us in line was a very old woman, ancient really, alone, a bit unsteady, confused, not thriving. George was next in line, as the woman turned to leave. But then this happened: I thought the patient had forgotten something, because George tapped her lightly on the arm to get her attention. But after she slowly turned, he said with that deep voice "I hope you will be feeling better".

During the entire thirty years George was my teacher and friend, nothing he did would place that kindly gesture out of character. It typified the man-a mensch---a counterweight to a society not always so civil as he himself. George just gave things, plain and simple, to those who happened to be at hand. By no means a pollyanna-actually quite tough-but persons with his reflexive kindness are rare. He was so generous that, of necessity, he stored people into mental cubbyholes, for easy access. Each student had such a spot, as did each colleague, family member, and his own former teachers (always "Mr. Neikrug", with respect). Some of those cubbyholes were unlabeled--maybe waiting for another old, sick woman he would meet only once, but for a brief moment, genuinely cared about.

We talked a lot. "So", I would ask about a student, "How is so-and-so doing?" His answer was invariably a fountain of praise and pride, detailed information of school and orchestra the student was with, fine performance in a recital, acceptance to Oberlin, success with thumb position, anecdotes one after another, -- and all positive, not forced. George was authentic to the core, a man I became convinced was almost addicted to optimism. "So, George", asked I, "have you ever had a clearly unteachable cello student?" "Yes," he said, "I do remember a few. I assume they're all out there doing well, studying piano." Then that special laugh, and those impish eyes.

I would from time to time mail George ten bars of a tough piece for fingering or bowing. "Only measures 44 to 54," I implored, not wanting to intrude on his time. But invariably the whole movement was returned, fully embroidered with those bold, juicy pencil marks that implied "do it this way, and they'll clamor for more". When I bought a bow in Philadelphia, George "happened" to be at Moennig's on that very day. I know it was coincidence--even he wouldn't travel hundreds of miles to help me choose--but it felt like it. This man would

think nothing of trotting off to Philadelphia to be sure that his student didn't buy the wrong stick. My son John once said to me "It isn't what you think of people that matters. It's what you think of yourself when you're with them". When I was with George, I liked myself.

This brings me to you, Evie, and your family, and your friends. Since I believe that good teachers are holy, we students best take care of them. With that in mind, I had the fine idea--one of my better ones, to tell you the truth--to tell George about you. In short, I fixed you up. Little did I know this would become a deep alliance of like souls anchored by great happiness. And I couldn't have wished for him a better adopted family and cohort of friends than those you brought with you to that white tent five years ago---Mary, Larry, Anita, and all the others. So I say Thank you, thank you, thank you again, even on this melancholy day, to that family onto which this dear man could become engrafted.

Well, Evie, we have clearly lost George too soon. But a patient's son once said to me as he faced the loss of his relatively young father, "My Dad did a lot, Doc, and it looks like he won't be doing much more". "But", he went on, "I guess a long life is a good thing, but so is a wide one. My Dad's was wide, I can tell you that." So, Evie, and Anne Marie and Andrew, and Evie's remarkable family that folded him in, life does have breadth as well as length. And George's long arms reached from one side to the other to pull it all in, and he pulled us all in with it.

At the hospital where George just now spent several days, a plaque on the wall memorializes a beloved and caring social worker named Robert Bretholz. Its words, from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, fit George as well: "For his bounty, there was no winter in't; an autumn it was that grew the more by reaping..."

Anetta, and our children send much love to you, Evie, and to that broad and loving family around you.

Andrew