

Residue and Legacy

Reading the obituaries in the Sunday *Tucson Star* recently, I noticed a name I knew. One of two key people who had an impact on my career had died, and because he was from an extended family with many members in this area, the paper presented a life tribute to him.

The notice brought back to mind thoughts shared recently by one of my sisters-acquired-later-in- life who resides in Massachusetts. She reflected on whether or not it has been more important to her to be remembered or to be known. People of a Certain Age, I suspect that we may have reached a certain age and stage in life where we think on such things. They are challenging to think about.

The man who died recently was an administrator at UCR, and I was a student leader in the dorms when we first met. Why he chose to spend time and energy helping me get started in university work, I can't really explain, except that we both loved baseball.

He offered me opportunities for growth in my tenure at UCR. Then, when he accepted a promotion at a university back east, he asked me to consider a promotion to join him there. We did not go there, but when he, as President of another university, proposed that I accept an even greater promotion, and into the Academic Affairs area, a fast-track to higher office, we went. And when he took a regional position for the College Board, he still offered me opportunities to expand my experience and knowledge.

His parents had emigrated from Mexico at a time when acceptance of people from south of the border into local affairs was dependent on the darkness of one's skin color. For him to earn a scholarship from the University of Arizona to play baseball and enroll in ROTC was a source of great pride for his parents.

Not surprisingly, working to level the playing field for persons of all colors and creeds was a cornerstone of his career. He was determined to be a part of making university admissions and programs accessible to anyone who had the interest, motivation, and talent to succeed.

That rubbed off on me.

The other man was the Chancellor during the years we worked at UCR, the one who counseled me that "we are often used by others. The question is used for what." He created a staff job for me as his Executive Assistant for Student Affairs, reporting to him and coordinating with the line officers in the Students Affairs Office.

I cannot explain why he did that. But he gave me a unique view as a 25-year-old of what executive leadership was like from the inside, and sprinkled bits of wisdom in our regular meetings.

Once, when the Dean of one of the Colleges railed at the Chancellor over something and left in a huff, I asked the Chancellor why he put up with the drama. "Because he's good at what he does.

As long as the pluses outweigh the minuses, work with people even when they occasionally annoy you."

He never used the phrase "eyes on the prize" but he guided UCR through threats to the campus's existence, due to low enrollment, and the People's Park era during which the University of California was subjected to multiple instances of enraged students. One evening, students occupied his office. He listened to their concerns, in person.

The administration building at UCR is named for him. His name, though perhaps not the full extent of his impact, is remembered. I don't think my baseball friend has a building named for him: maybe a scholarship here or there. Both, however, are known, by me and to others like me whom they have touched.

My Massachusetts muse shared lines written in *The Marginalian* by Maria Popova. Popova spoke to the effort people invest on finding meaning in their lives though their lives are finite in length. She wrote:

“When you die—when these organized atoms that shimmer with fascination and feeling—disband to become unfeeling stardust once more, everything that fills your particular mind and its rosary of days with meaning will be gone too. From its particular vantage point, there will be no more meaning, for the point itself will have dissolved—there will only be other humans left, making meaning of their own lives, including any meaning that they might make of the residue of yours.”

A couple of people who have worked with me over the years have commented in recent days on particular ways I said or did things that they have remembered, even used, in their work. Without doubt, whatever these were bore the residue of the two men above. They are, of course, residue of me as well.

Perhaps one or both of my mentors thought about legacy, though I doubt it, beyond the genetic legacy of children. Perhaps they knew that a legacy is only a legacy if people think it so, and no one of us can control what people think after we are gone.

Probably, whatever residue remains of a life rapidly loses provenance. The original is forgotten. Isn't it uplifting, though, to think that strains of residue persist, that lessons we have learned and passed on, not with the intent of being remembered but only to address a specific instance, might linger longer than the memory of us?

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