

## Lessons for a Lifetime

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Once, years ago, at a special conference in Utah to mark the retirement of his mentor Merlin Forster, George asked me why I'd been invited. So, in the event that you are wondering why I'm among the group included in this issue of *LATR*, I should explain that I speak on behalf of those who had the good fortune to study with George.

I first met George upon arrival in Guadalajara in the summer of 1975. On the first day of class, I saw a pack of young *gringos* and asked them where I might find Professor Woodyard. I was taken aback when an impossibly young-looking person stepped forward and said in that chipper voice, "That's me." Little did I know that that summer and that first class on Latin American theatre were to be the beginning of the rest of my life.

To be George's student was a privilege. To be his *LATR* editorial assistant was an even greater privilege, for it provided the opportunity to learn at the side of the master, along with a key to the inner sanctum of Latin American theatre, his office. I had instant access to George's treasure trove of plays, and also, through *LATR* correspondence, became acquainted with all the big fish in Latin American theatre. George was unstinting in his appreciation for a job well done, which of course made one work all the harder. Smart man!

In addition to basic training in the *LATR* office, I took several classes with George. His classes were informal and inviting. He did not lecture, but rather sat on the edge of the table and held court, smiling, as we expressed our ideas, both sharp and dumb. His only teaching aid was a manila folder, which contained materials pertaining to the play and/or dramatist to be discussed that day, and which he would extract from one of his enormous filing cabinets on his way to class. I don't remember him actually OPENING one of those folders, but I guess they were his security blanket in the event that

someone asked him a question that he couldn't answer. But, as we all know, George ALWAYS knew the answer. In fact, one of the first lessons I learned was that it was useless to argue with George: he was always right. Once, from the back seat of his enormous station wagon, I discovered that this was also true with regard to traveling, as he and Eleanor discussed rather heatedly the best way to exit the beltway in Lexington, Kentucky. Speaking of travel, I should confess that if I sort of know my way around Mexico City and Buenos Aires, it is thanks to our friend, the human *brújula*, though it was hard to memorize the route due to the blistering pace at which he walked and the bad habit that he had of jaywalking without warning and leaving one talking to oneself on the other side of the street.

Colleagues express great envy when I speak of George and the support, both personal and professional, that he gave me over the years. While many academics never exchange another word with their mentor after receiving their degree, George continued to be not only our mentor, but also our anchor, our reality-check, our friend, our confidante, and our inspiration long after we left the halls of Wescoe. He was a model of integrity, generosity, modesty, productivity, and graciousness. We *Woodyarditos* wanted, and still want, nothing more than to be just like him. My own personal worship of George was, in hindsight, pathetic, and I can only thank Eleanor for allowing me to follow him around like a piece of human velcro.

Those who attended the funeral in Lawrence might have noticed, amidst the photos, a framed document titled "Lessons for a Lifetime," which George's daughter, Shana, was kind enough to share with me. In this undated document, George lists 17 lessons for a lifetime, prefaced with a parenthetical comment in which he states, with his trademark modesty: "Not necessarily *my* lifetime, but perhaps a reflection of the way I wish I had lived my life, even if it didn't always turn out that way." While these were the lessons of his own lifetime, I would suggest that they were also the unstated lessons that he gave, through example, to his students. I include here the three lessons that, in my mind, best reflect George's *teachings* for a lifetime:

#13. The line between timid and egotistical is very important. Be careful to stay in the middle of the road.

#15. Always remember that you can catch more flies with sugar than with vinegar. Being sweet and kind, even in adversity, is a virtue.

#17. (This one is George to the core) Do live your life so that at the end, whenever that comes, people will remember you

charitably for your selflessness and your kindness. In the final analysis, the material things are of little value, but the kind of life you lead speaks much more loudly.

I miss George. He was my mentor, my friend, my idol, my faithful correspondent, my relentless promoter, my source of wisdom, my life-long teacher. If he had been with us at the conference/festival for which these words were originally prepared, he would have been sitting in the audience, jotting notes on a napkin, which he'd later present to me with a smile and a "nice work, Jacqueline." On the napkin would be written whatever words I had mispronounced during the last five minutes.

If only one could send email to Heaven.

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