

PAUL MYRON by John Radner H'60

Paul Myron of N. Bethesda, Maryland, died on Monday, January 16, 2012. He is survived by his sister Mary and her husband Joseph Giere, their four children, eight grandnieces and nephews and many friends. In April 2012 two dozen of these friends and relatives gathered to share memories of Paul from grade school onwards: stories of Paul as superb athlete and unbeatable chess player; as thoughtful friend and perfect uncle; as lover of ice cream, Thai food, and coffee; as funny, genial, challenging conversationalist. If I had a transcript of this richly collaborative celebration of Paul's life, I would pass along key sections. Instead I will quote some of what I said at Paul's funeral.

Though I met Paul Myron when we both started high school, we became close only as roommates in college, coping together with the social and academic challenges of Harvard, constantly measuring ourselves against each other. Paul was always deeper delving than I. He took things to heart, held tight to whatever he found significant, and brooded constructively.

After his first experience at nineteen with what was later diagnosed as bi-polar disorder, Paul decided to become a psychiatrist, and began reading Freud on his own, along with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus, Dante and Dostoyevsky. For Erik Erikson's course on human development the year after most of our class graduated, Paul wrote a paper that Jeff Nason (H'60) described as a Christian justification for psychoanalysis—a paper that posits an instinct for significance: “an instinct directed towards rendering every event in a person’s past life, and every aspect of his or her present condition significant to what he or she is, and to what he or she hopes to become.” Paul used this instinct to interpret the key psychoanalytic concepts of regression and transference, and insisted that only this instinct could fully explain the behavior that Freud accounted for first with the Pleasure Principle and later with the Death Wish. “Too many men have sought joy through suffering, too many have pursued suffering in quest of significance, too many have testified that pain – *and* pleasure – become intolerable *only* when they have become meaningless, to let me be persuaded that man prefers to find, in the consummation of an experience, the release of bodily tension rather than the grasp of his own significance.”

In this paper, eventually published in *The Current*, the journal Paul founded for the Harvard-Radcliffe Catholic Club, Paul also wrote that “Psychology is the consolation of those who can neither sing nor dance.” Paul was more passionately engaged with music than almost anyone else I knew: with Beethoven and Elvis in high school, and later also with Dylan, Wagner, the Rolling Stones, and many, many others. He played guitar, and took piano lessons in order to play Beethoven’s sonatas. But much of the time Paul was unsatisfied with himself. His work as an analyst was unfulfilling: diagnosing patients for admission rather than helping them recover. He never married, didn’t own a house, and periodically was hospitalized.

When his manic-depressive disorder forced him to retire early, he taught English to non-native speakers, which he loved, and regularly connected with friends and relatives. But

until he turned sixty there was an aggressive edge to his conversations. Then there was a shift. Paul seemed to become more at ease, more accepting of all he had done—and not done. Getting together for lunch or coffee was no longer tense, and we both could better appreciate Paul's insightful, informed comments, his humor, his astute assessments of others and his openness in expressing emotions, his strong attachment to people and books that fully engaged him, his generosity and gentleness.