

Martin Meyerson: My Memories of Martin

Bruce Johnstone

I am honored to be among those asked to say a few words about Martin. I come as a mentee and colleague, having served as Martin's executive assistant and vice president from '72 through '79, as a friend and admirer ever since, and as a representative of the State University of New York at Buffalo, which burst into the sunlight of academic prominence under his leadership in the heady, tumultuous early days of the SUNY system. I convey the gratitude and respect of so many still at Buffalo, including our president, John Simpson.

I cannot help but be reminded of the last time—a happier time—I spoke of Martin to a gathering of his friends and admirers. It was at his retirement dinner upon his leaving the presidency of this university, which he so loved. I used then the word undaunted—as:

- In the face of conflict and polarity, always able to see the nuanced sides of a contested issue and somehow synthesize an answer; or
- In the face of so-called experts, who knew how it had been done before, or how it was supposed to be done—but not necessarily how it could be done to break out of the box and show a new way.

Today, I am thinking of the word prodigious—as in memory, heart, integrity, learning, and loyalty.

All of which may help explain the phenomenon of how so many who served for and with Martin went on to positions of leadership in higher education.

Martin brought me to Penn to try to fill the shoes of Don Stewart. He made me a vice president and then sent me on to the presidency of Buffalo State College in 1979 and was instrumental in my being tapped for the chancellorship of the SUNY system in 1988. Like so many before and after me.

Counting only college and university presidents—and even then incurring the risk of missing more than one—I think of Vartan Gregorian, Jim Freedman, and Donald Stewart, Bob O'Neil, and Dorie Friend. Tish Emerson, Don Langenberg, Humphrey Tonkin, Jon Strauss, Claire Gaudiani, and Martin's brilliant young undergraduate assistant, Arnie Eisen. And so many others, such as Bob Zemsky, Tom Langfitt, Lee Salamon, Hank Dullea, Buzz Arnold, and others who have made such a mark on the higher educational landscape

Martin delighted in challenging, encouraging, and assisting us.

It was not that he showed us how to be a president: there are too many models. I think he showed us, rather, that leadership mattered, that the university was an extraordinary institution, which took nuance as well as decisiveness, and respect for its past as well as creativity and boldness in leading it into the future. And along the way, a thick skin and more than a little humor goes a long way.

I am not sure whether he actually taught us these qualities. But he showed them to us, and thereby affected each of us.

We'll miss you Martin. But we will stay in touch your extraordinary lifetime partner, Margy, and with Adam and Mathew, of whom you were so rightly proud.

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