



Plymouth Congregational Church

Coconut Grove - Miami, Florida

David Pangmon Wood Jr.

1922-2003

Betty Pesek

From: Priscilla H. Wilson
Sent: Monday, February 03, 2003 11:37 AM
To: Betty Pesek
Subject: Priscilla's Reflections

David Wood Memorial Service – February 1, 2003

Comments by Priscilla Wilson during the service.

Thirty-six years ago I met Anne Wood on the West Side of Chicago, she was pregnant with Jennifer. A group of women met at The Ecumenical Institute to question how to serve the urban community. We continued to meet regularly and two years later we decided our husbands should meet each other.

Subsequently several couples met for a weekend. We cut Sunday afternoon short as that was Super Bowl weekend. The decision was made to “be a group” and David Wood became my brother. A bit of time passed and we embarked on a three-week study trip around the world, the Global Odyssey. This solidified our journey for the next twelve years.

We continued to engage in study of what the church’s theological truths meant in our lives in light of our new global understanding. We served the church and the world in a variety of courses, projects and locations.

One of the things we frequently did was leave our children for a weekend with two “leaders” so that we could engage in writing courses, study or other projects. One weekend David Wood and I were assigned to keep the children (thirteen in number if I count right) at the Phillips house. All went well until Robert, the youngest at two, fell and cut his head rather badly. In looking back it seems that either David was terrified of staying with twelve kids alone or with taking one bleeding child to the hospital alone. In either case, we bundled all thirteen kids into a station wagon (this was long before car seats or seat belts) and headed for the hospital. My daughter, Mary, remembers sitting in the back of the station wagon with Robert in the front on my lap, bleeding. We got the necessary stitches and David and I did right well for the rest of the weekend.

Our group spent Christmas Eve together each year. The year we were at the Wood’s house, my parents were visiting from Kansas. We sat across the table from David. He sang and participated in the liturgy with such gusto that forever after my father referred to him as, “Amen David.”

In 1972 my husband, Rodney, and David joined the Dean of the Institute and two other men for a trip across Europe and northern Africa. They were visiting church leaders to discover the best avenues for global service and human development. Rod and David parted from the team at Geneva, Switzerland and took off by train for Interlaken. They rented an automobile, loaded it on a train car and proceeded up the Jungfrau (just under 12,000 feet). David found out he didn’t do well at high altitude and he kept insisting, “Rodney, get me out of here, I’m going to die.” Needless to say, they got out of there and drove on to Florence where they

planned to stop overnight. The team insisted they drive on to Rome in order to fly to Addis Abba the next day. So off they went, entering Rome after dark in a pouring rain. Expecting to meet the rest of the team at a religious compound near the Vatican where they were to stay, they realized they didn't have a clue how to find the place.

David had the genius idea to get a taxi and Rod would follow in their rented car. If you've ever seen traffic in Rome – add darkness and rain to that and you can see why my husband was sure he wouldn't get out in one piece. They made it though.

Two other international experiences with Anne and David: the Institute's international conference near Bilbao, Spain in 1986. And in 1988, the international conference in Mexico. In both cases we enjoyed time to play as well as work with the other participants.

The biggest surprise ever came mid-point during my 60th birthday party in Kansas City. The guests were all local folks and relatives. The door bell rings – I go to the front hall – and there are the Woods, David and Anne have come across the country to celebrate with me. My family says that the shout I gave in surprise could be heard in the next county.

David Wood's style of possibility, globality and hope came from many influences in his life. I believe that some of the strongest influences came from two of the theologians we studied. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insight that responsibility is made up of 100% obedience and 100% freedom. The other is the understanding from Paul Tillich that "I am accepted by that which is greater than me."

Two weeks before David's death a mutual colleague and friend, John Cock, shared a poem with David. Since John didn't have Wood's email address the poem came via my email. (The family had printed the poem in the Memorial Service program.)

REFLECTIONS

On the day when death will knock at thy door

what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest

the full vessel of my life—

I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn
days and summer nights, all the earnings
and gleanings of my busy life will I place

before him at the close of my days when

Death will knock at my door.

I was not aware of the moment when I

first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me

open out into this vast mystery

like a bud in the forest at midnight!

When in the morning I looked upon the light

I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world,

that the inscrutable without name and form

had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown

will appear as ever known to me.

And because I love this life,

I know I shall love Death as well.

Gitanjali: A Collection of Indian Songs by Rabindranath Tagore

It is with sadness and celebration that I share these thoughts as we memorialize the life of David. I learned of David's passing, moments before boarding a flight from New York to Chicago, so I took the opportunity of being "alone" to order a Scotch, a ritual David and I often shared when together, and reflect on the importance of his life and the many contributions he made to me.

Firstly, in all forms of measure it must be said that David lived a wonderfully successful life.

Having grown up in rural Australia, David was the first "successful" person I got to know in my younger days. I remember when I was 20-21, being impressed by his success, his legal acumen, the many prominent people who trusted him to guide them with their most personal decisions, his club(s), his home, his family and by his humanness. Here was a really successful guy who was very down-to-earth, who let it all hang out. He was very human. He taught me that success is not what's important, but family, colleagues and being comfortable with whom you are, what you do, and whom you choose to be. In the midst of his success David demonstrated to me profound generosity which he manifest through the generous contributions of time, money and collegiality that he gave to the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs.

Secondly, David lived a life that embodied the profound paradox of life.

I experienced David as a man of paradox in many ways. He was conservative, a faithful Republican, a person who "did things by the book", while at the same time he had a revolutionary flair that mystified his conservative friends and astounded the liberals. He taught me the value of balance in life, of knowing what you stand for, and standing for it. Many times in his role as President of the Institutes' Board he stood firm in his support and true to his convictions when a lesser man would have walked away, and indeed many did.

He was a direct person who, at times, appeared blunt and gruff, yet he had a softness and gentleness that would be envied by lambs! He taught me the value of saying what's on your mind without pontificating too much and leaving it at that.

He was a careful man, who did things with precision. He did things "right" by conventional terms, yet in his actions he was willing to tread beyond the bounds of acceptability to what was truly right, even though it was not popular. His support of the civil rights movement in the 60's is but one example.

Thirdly, David lived the life of a man that could be trusted

David was a wonderful "Father" figure to me. Of course his own family was the first and foremost of all his relationships. The depth of spirit, love and unity that the Wood family manifests is the ultimate tribute to David and to Anne's special place in history. But there were others of us who also were privileged to be included in David's larger family. I knew I could talk with him, confide in him, and I knew I could trust him to keep a confidence, to challenge me, to raise

questions, and occasionally to provide guidance. In short I could trust David and I could trust David to be David. Like most Father figures, there were things about which he and I could never agree and I could trust that to be so. But I knew I could trust his friendship, his collegiality, his candor and his love, no matter what I said or did.

I was not present at the time of his death, but I was most honored to be present to his dying. I was amazed by the self-consciousness and courage David displayed, as the mystery of death intensified. I will be forever grateful for the lesson that both David and Anne have given to me in this regard, and while I cannot imagine the depth of courage, consciousness and care that David had, I vow to attempt to emulate him in his dying.

I am very grateful for the time we spent together last month. I had a great day. It was fun, warm and provocative—just another day with DPW Jr.! I came away, reminded that life is lived in the here and now. We didn't spend a lot of time reminiscing about the past, although we shared a few stories of past adventures. We didn't drown in the mystery of the future and in his death that was so eminent, although we talked about his situation, hospice, fears and things unknown.

Mostly, we simply had a great time in the here and now. It was a truly fulfilling experience. We shared family pictures, some stories about our offspring, and drank some 21 year old Scotch. We laughed, had a fine dinner at the Club, and celebrated our relationship and the warmth of that relationship with each other.

We simply lived in the here and now of December 13, 2002. I was again reminded by that time with Anne and David that **that** is the secret of living - to be conscious in the here and now, and that is the art of dying in grace.

I know David lives forever. His baritone voice, heard in speech and loud singing, his life lessons, his life examples, these live with all of us who know him. In our own way, each will continue to pass David along to future generations.

I know his spirit soars like an Eagle. I am certain about this, because the life that David lived, and the life that David lives eternal, is good. It is very good, and I am grateful and honored to be able to call David my friend forever.

So as I finish I raise a silent toast to David and especially thank you for the care and love you have shared with me for so many years, but especially this past year. I am grateful - we here gathered are deeply grateful for the life of David P. Wood, Jr.

David Lived, David Died, David Lives Eternally. Amen