

## LEG Eulogy from David Lang

December 10, 2010

Hello, I'm Dave Lang and am married to Julia, Larry and Miriam's daughter. Obviously, I can't speak personally of Larry's towering academic presence and accomplishments, but I can tell you a little bit about the wonderful relationship I enjoyed with Larry and continue to enjoy with Miriam.

Just as Ben Gelfand, Ron and Jean's son enjoyed favorite grandchild status, I had the notoriety of being their favorite son-in-law. And the fact there was no competition for either position, didn't diminish the relish, with which we both enjoyed these distinctions.

Larry was certainly one of a kind. I related with much joy and love some of the idiosyncrasies that Julia and I recall, even if they could be somewhat frustrating to those affected by them. For example, Larry could certainly be the absent-minded professor, at times. I enjoyed the story about a research trip that Larry made to various cities, for which Miriam helped him pack. About a week into this three week trip, he ran out of dress shirts and berated Miriam for not including enough, when she prepared his bags. He promptly visited Brooks Brothers, bought more shirts, and it was only upon his return home, that Miriam found the two dozen folded shirts she had indeed included, but which Larry never discovered, lying underneath the first few layers of clothing in the suitcase.

Or the time that Larry traveled to Cleveland to attend a family celebration and encountered a cousin he hadn't seen in many years. They became so engrossed in their animated conversation, that they blindly followed the crowd into a banquet room, partook of food and drink, only to eventually discover they were gate crashing another affair.

Larry was certainly the eternal optimist. Miriam remembers the time when Larry was defending this dissertation, a time they were raising Julia and Daniel, Ronald was not yet born. The job market was tight and yet Larry kept rejecting potential offers; academic institutions in the southwest desert region, because of Larry's fear of snakes, other institutions that were too conservative for his liking or climatically undesirable as Larry liked the change of seasons. Ultimately, he accepted positions at Laramie and then in Iowa City. Larry just didn't stress out about such matters.

Larry did enjoy eating, but he was a selective connoisseur. Clearly too much macaroni and cheese from his Army days, prohibited him from even considering such staples in civilian life and although he liked some Italian food (especially Northern), he generally eschewed pasta or anything resembling elbow macaroni. Julia tells me the family looked forward to his research forays and absences away from home, so that they might enjoy mac & cheese, lasagna and other such delights.

Larry also loved to explore restaurants in Iowa City and the surrounding communities with friends and family, such as LeClaire (think Severson's and the wonderful views of the Mississippi River). On trips to California, Larry would salivate for days and talk with us on the phone about restaurants he might like to visit: delis, Chinese and Thai establishments, establishments that received new Michelin stars, and the like. Larry also enjoyed fine wine, which he later had to forgo for dietary and health reasons.

Julia and Miriam also shared with me that at one time Larry enjoyed his Friday night scotch drinking routine with Syd James, where the couples (Larry, Miriam, Syd and Jean) would catch up on university business and current events, smoke pipes and trade newspapers, magazines and journals.

Unlike, most men, Larry was not adverse to shopping, when the mood struck, or, when traveling or visiting his children. He would indulge Julia and accompany her to art galleries, museums and craft shows, not necessarily to buy, but to look, browse and offer his unique commentary. He certainly wasn't a clotheshorse, but when he liked a certain fit or style, he would obsess about finding a replacement, even if the item was out of style or otherwise not easily available or located.

One of my first experiences in Iowa City was accompanying Larry to Jack's out on old Highway 218 (he specifically condemned Walmarts at the time, that had recently made its debut which he felt would drive out some of the old local standby retail establishments). He had found a two-for-one ad in the paper for mouthwash and bought two huge bottles, which I sensed could not be finished in my lifetime. As it happens, I'm told that when Larry and Miriam eventually moved to Oaknoll, their closets and garage at the previous home, still contained surplus from Larry's shopping sprees at Jack's and probably other such venues.

Another area that I can certainly relate to, was Larry's gym routine and other physical activities he enjoyed. He always led a fairly active lifestyle growing up, including walking, swimming, hiking and tennis. He became a bit more sedentary later in life, but his first heart surgery in 1997 was a wake-up call and he became serious about weight training and aerobics. But, he didn't like to socialize or chat with others, when exercising, and purposely rose early to avoid any gym crowd. Before Oaknoll, at his previous gym, he was given the key to the gym, in order to open the facility in case staff was late to work and to be able to work out before others arrived, plotting distances and times achieved on the elliptical machine and bike. Similarly, at Oaknoll, he'd sport his own getups, not your typical workout clothes, again signing in early at 4:30am avoiding the early gym junkies during his exercise routines.

All these stories, we lovingly and affectionately share with you about this smart, articulate, complex and humorous man, who loved his family. Despite frequent sharp ripostes, he loved Miriam, a great wife and mother. Larry lived life to the fullest and loved the life he lived. He loved teaching, reading and writing. Each of us should be so lucky to conclude life as Larry did. At the end of the day and towards the end of his days, he did what he set out to do and followed his dreams. I believe from what I know of Larry, he died having no regrets and encouraged his children to follow that credo. He was generous, gracious, loveable, and just plain unique. Larry passed away, just after the Thanksgiving holiday, and each member of the immediate family had a chance to spend truly quality time with him doing what both he and they liked doing together.

The family has been touched by the outpouring of sympathy that has come from so many corners, from colleagues, students and friends. Dr. Akira Iriye, a diplomatic historian at Harvard wrote, "Larry was among my favorite professional colleagues, very gentle, pleasantly animated, passionate about teaching and research," and when referring to Dr. Liu said, "I've always thought of you and him together as an admirable academic couple," That would have made Larry very happy.

A friend and former colleague here at Iowa, Dr. Alan Spitzer, wrote, "He was a loyal friend and sterling colleague, a man of flawless integrity dedicated to the perpetuation of the best values of our small academic community. His "strongly worded" letters always courageously said what needed to be said."

These sentiments were echoed by many former students. Dr. David Kilroy wrote, "I can honestly say, without any hint of exaggeration, that I would not be where I am today without Larry's encouragement, mentorship and support." "...he was one of the greatest influences on my life and one of the nicest and most sincere people I have had the privilege to know."

Shomer Zwelling, a former Sunday School teacher at this Synagogue and a student who Larry could not persuade to stay at Iowa for his doctorate, writes, "Such a lovely and generous person, such an exquisite teacher and mentor, such a mensch of the first order. I was most fortunate to encounter Larry when I was an innocent MA student on the brink of adulthood and professional life in 1965. I appreciated him very much then. Over the years, I have only come to cherish him all the more deeply: his fabulous smile and twinkling eyes, his gentle but direct questioning, his probing and lively mind, his joie de vivre, his energetic gait, his genuine concern for the well being of others, his marvelous capacity to enthusiastically embrace both past and present, his admirable sense of proportion and balance."

A graduate student Larry never met at the University of Connecticut, but the most recent recipient of the Lawrence Gelfand/Armin Rappaport Fellowship Award wrote, "While I did not know him, I am honored and grateful to be a recipient of an award named for him. The fellowship will help me fund the completion of my PhD in a timely way. In this way, your father has helped to advance my professional career and I'm thankful for that." Just one great example of Larry playing it forward.

Rabbi Lee Diamond, a former rabbi here in this pulpit, wrote from Israel, "it has been many years since I had the opportunity to be with Larry, and yet, he remains a vital part of my life and life's experience. In my life, I have come to understand how some individuals can really touch your soul and being in the most gentle and caring way. Yet these very people never really know how significant their influence is. Worse yet, is that we often fail to share this feeling with those very people. In my days in Iowa City, Larry was indeed a caring friend, who had the courage and the wisdom to help guide and support me in my growth as a rabbi and Jew, with gentle criticism and open discussion."

So Miriam, you have had the joys and challenges these past 57 years you shared with Larry. Your experiences with him took you around the world and your children were indeed lucky to have you both as parents. The family has expanded to include Jean, Ben and me, not to mention the extended family of students and their families, who you and Larry so generously embraced. These testimonies of friends and family speak volumes about your contributions to a life well lived in this wonderful Iowa City community and in this congregation. I think Larry would enjoy the fuss we're making about him today, although he probably would have encouraged us to shuck our ties, no ties being one of his favorite things about retirement. Personally, I'll miss my football watching companion. Larry and you have converted me to being a Hawkeye fan, at least when Iowa isn't playing my beloved Nittany Lions. All of us here loved you Larry and we'll miss you dearly.

The family is very grateful for your presence here today to pay tribute to Larry's memory and support the family.

Now I'd like to introduce Benjamin Gelfand, Larry's "favorite grandson," who will share a poem that reminds him of his grandfather.