

Eulogy for Jack Myers

Jack Myers was my teacher and my friend. Jack was so fine a teacher, so wise, so discerning, that I trusted him with intimacies I shared with few others. And he was so rare a friend—so honest, so fearless, so often right about the dark and stubborn parts of my nature—that what I learned from him could never be contained by any syllabus. Jack was the first person who ever told me it was OK, that in fact it was a fine thing, to be crazy enough to try to build a life around writing. And he shared with me not only an amazing savvy about poetry, how you really write it, how you survive writing it day after day, indispensable knowledge for a young poet, but also how poetry lives by being passed on from one generation to the next with patience and graciousness, how poetry comes to us not just by books or schools but by that kindly exchange between human beings that is a kind of blessing.

Although Jack was a master craftsman, what I learned best from him was not technique or strategy or device, but how poetry can clarify and deepen one's sense of being, how it can become a way to resist the crassness and coldness and falseness of so much of our daily lives.

Most of you know about Jack's distinguished service at colleges and universities around the country. But you may not know about Jack's less public teaching, how much and how generously he shared himself here in this city, not only at readings and lectures but face to face, person to person, freely and simply and modestly, with so little of the ego and defensiveness we see in so often in our literary stars. All through the 1980s and the 1990s, when Dallas was first becoming a truly literary city, Jack simply began to teach anyone who wanted to learn, wherever he happened to be, and one person at a time,

one poem at a time, Jack and a very few other people began to build an enduring and thriving literary culture independent of the academy in a city where no such thing had existed before. Communities, even communities as fractious as literary communities, work because they share a common property, a common legacy, a common culture. Here in Dallas, a lot of what we shared was Jack: his humility, his sense of honor and purpose in being a poet, his wide and deep knowledge of literature and life, his willingness to try, day after day, to bring the fine art of literature into the life of a city whose business so often seemed to be business, business, and only business.

I miss Jack tremendously and I seem to miss him more every day. Jack was my ace in the hole. So long as he lived, I always felt there was someone I could get an answer from, even if I had a very big question. There's really just no replacing him. Jack lived a life so big it takes all of us here now to remember it. That's our job now, I think, to remember Jack. And then to do what he did—to try to make a really big life happen, for all of us.

Thank you. And thank you, Jack.

Joe Ahearn

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