

August 4, 2020

Eulogy for Sumner

It is with a deep sense of sorrow and grief that I speak to you today on the passing of my late and most dear friend and companion Sumner Freedman. Whereas we have known one another for nearly ten years and had each relished our relationship with the other, enjoying the fruits of our secure and fruitful association, it had only been for the past year or so that we were thrust ever more close by the vicissitudes and capriciousness of life itself as it dealt us both severe life-threatening illnesses nearly simultaneously. Despite all this we were both there for one another and in the past few months a day did not pass without our viewing one another on Face-time despite the ever present threat of Covid restricting our physical in person proximity.

But for now I would like to touch on some anecdotal stories about Sumner and the unusual circumstance of our initial meeting nearly ten years ago at the Essex Bridge Center in Livingston NJ. I was in need of a partner that day and when I approached the director, Ken Powel, he pointed to a good looking gentleman about my age with salt and pepper hair, who had a reputation of being a master of masters and to top it off, the piece de resistance, he was a native Bostonian. This was too good to be true!! I quickly introduced myself and a multitude of further coincidences were revealed during the ensuing discussion, i.e. playing Jewish

Geography. Not only was he a Bostonian, being born three years after I, he even grew up on the same street in Brighton, Mass., and attended the very same elementary school as I. While studying as an undergraduate at Boston University, he took up playing bridge avidly and for big money at the renowned Boston Chess and Bridge Club at which time he became quite friendly with another expert bridge player named James Polonsky. Eventually they became roommates during their college years. As amazing as it may seem, this very same James Polonsky eventually married, moved to NJ and held a prestigious position at Vice Presidential Financial Advisor at Merrill Lynch in Short Hills, NJ. As if fate will have it, he was totally instrumental in hiring my wife, Dahlia, at the firm, and taking her in as his partner in 1995.

Sumner's relationship with his life's partner, Roz, was unique to say the least. He met her initially at BU but was reluctant at first to commit to her and became involved with another until that relationship unraveled. He was at that time employed as an attorney in Boston and enjoyed a teaching position at Fisher College which he reveled in. During that time Roz, however, moved to NJ with her daughter Dana from her first marriage, having been divorced earlier. That did not deter Sumner in the least and he would religiously commute every single weekend from Boston to Short Hills up until several years ago to be with his "Dahling", as he affectionately called Roz. He enthusiastically embraced

the Middlemark family becoming the respected and beloved senior male figure to Roz's remarkable mother Rachel, her daughter Dana, Dana's husband Chris, and their three fantastic boys Chase, Aiden and Nolan, helping out each and every day of his "retirement" here with either playing with the children or being their dependable personal chauffeur bringing them to school early in the morning and picking each one up in the afternoon without fail.

At the bridge club he truly remains a legend. Surely being one of the best, if not, in my opinion, the best player there, he was constantly courted by many to be *their* partner, and I feel so special for his opting to take me under his wing as his student and fellow Bostonian. In addition his knowledge of the game of baseball and history of the sport was simply unparalleled and totally amazing so much so that at the club numerous players would come over to our table between rounds to chat, pounding him with obscure and arcane questions concerning historical facts going back to the origins of the game and never was there an incorrect answer forthcoming from the Master, to the frustration and bewilderment of all assembled.

In closing, I will forever cherish the many memorable occasions I have shared with dear Master Sumner the past ten years:

Being chosen to be his favorite bridge partner,

Being awed and taken aback by his frequently eccentric bidding taking us to a winning slam which no other couple was able to bid or make,

Being his formidable opponent in our cribbage tournaments in between rounds at the bridge club attracting numerous curious onlookers,

Being his pre-bridge dinner companion at the Ritz Diner where we would discuss calmly and without rancor our diametrically opposite political views (up until recently notwithstanding), and finally when all four of us, Sumner, Roz, Dahlia and I would attend outdoor “hippy” concerts set up and run by my nephew at Bear Mountain, NY, where Sumner and I would dance away together in front of the stage, listening to Grateful Dead music, accompanied by the wafting of the aroma of cannabis in the air, reminiscent of Woodstock.

These memories are indelibly etched in my mind and will never be forgotten!!

Master Sumner, I will miss you dearly and may your memory be for a blessing.

Irving Peyser

