

Sy Coopersmith Memorial

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This is a difficult talk for me...Sy was among my oldest and dearest friends ...we were students together, starting our analytic training, in the 1960's. We were both relatively young and looking for a new home, a new sense of self, a new way of being in the world. We had different backgrounds but shared these goals.

Many of Sy's accomplishments will be reiterate today and his major contributions to NPAP and to psychoanalysis will be celebrated, as they should be. I want to talk, for just a few minutes, on a more personal level.

How to start? What to say? How do you catch fifty years – words are not up to the task. How can I convey that Sy and I were close enough that we didn't have to talk frequently to know that we cared for each other? Many times during those years we were geographically apart, yet we always felt protective of each other and cherished our deep connection. I am at a loss to capture these years...so I am going to just skip around, dip in and out of my many memories...to convey the sadness, the loss I feel and the love I have for Sy.

Sy was always one of the most generous persons I have had the gift of knowing ...soon after we began our studies in 1965, Sy invited me and my family to his home in East Hampton. I had known East Hampton from my former seminary days and loved it. His generosity was a constant and Julia, Paul and Connie came to know Sy over the many years of our visits and came to love him as well. In those early days he was affectionately known as the Mayor of East Hampton and his parties were a covered social event!! His home was the Grand Central Station of East Hampton. When Julia and I eventually bought a house in there we would see him and Valerie

more frequently, particularly during the summer months. For many years we lived some distance apart, I in Connecticut and he in New York. But distance did not limit us at important moments. It was Sy who toasted me at my fiftieth birthday party and, most recently, came to my eightieth birthday party.

Funny, as I think of it, our friendship did not necessarily deepen as the years went on, nor did it lessen when we were not geographical close and able to see each other often...it just was always there. Sy's constant, calm, humorous and yet very perceptive presence, his availability and openness were the foundation and the life force of our friendship. Those are words...analysts like words...but bottom line...we just always liked and respected each other. (Our friendship even withstood my graduating six months earlier than him...but, his revenge, as he was fond of informing me, was that he was president first and served more often !!)

His "authority" was so strong in our family that when Julia and I would frequently ask my son Paul, "when, if ever, he planned on getting married" as his finished his third decade and started his fourth, all he would say to us was – referring to Sy: I am following Sy, that man is my hero"!... That closed the discussion – every time!

We all knew Sy's happiness when he married Valerie at that joyful East Hampton wedding and his joy at the birth of Andy. I knew that he had completed a circle, so to speak...that he was where he wanted to be, settled and a father. It was one of the deepest satisfactions for him and really for Julia and myself as well.

Years later, when I was grieving for Julia, and had a five-hour period of transient-global amnesia, - as Connie, working in lower Manhattan, asked her boyfriend to come and make sure I was physically ok, - it was Sy, who Paul called for help, - until he could come himself, and it was Sy who phoned his friend, Jerry, to help me find my ground again. And, for a few minutes, he reached past my forgetting and in his calm, consistent and open caring way, helped me remember that I had lost my

sweetheart. It was finally the sight of my children that fully brought me back to accepting my loss.

In fifty years of friendship I do not think we ever had a serious disagreement...I do remember once our differing over a decision we had to make at NPAP. What I like to characterize as my “focused intensity” was always matched by his sober wisdom and practical suggestions. I cannot remember the particulars but I will always remember Sy’s response when he said to me that he would let NPAP go, that it was just an organization but that our friendship was far more important to him! The particular issue washed away. It was one of the moments when the depth of our caring for each other came to the surface – another gift that he gave me.

We knew how much both of us loved NPAP...we had worked together in our shared times on the Boards of Directors; in helping to found IFPE and to keep it an open organization, not a qualifying one. We were both supportive of NAAP when it was first organized. We shared our concerns over the years about the growth and direction of NPAP and even over CPP...an organization that is no longer around. We had both gone to Philadelphia to interview the IPA for NPAP possibly joining. Sy’s fierce defense of lay analysts and our NPAP standards were evident once again. We would not give in to the demands that we have a two tier system of analysts. Better to stand alone than capitulate to arbitrary standards that served the power structure rather than the profession.

It was last September, on a still warm day, on his porch in East Hampton, when we last spoke in each other’s presence. I helped him out of the kitchen to his chair and he told me to go back to the kitchen and make myself a drink. Always generous. He was certainly affected by all he has been through, these past five years, yet he was grateful to life, to Valerie and Andy for being there and grateful for his clarity of mind, notwithstanding his weakened body. We were just two old friends

talking...Sy asking me what and how I was doing, as well as how Paul and Connie and their children were getting on...gracious as ever and genuine in his interest.

In the silence between our words we both knew, in all likelihood, that Sy would be leaving first...but that was not darkness...We would always love each other....and that is a gift I will carry with me...all my days...