

ALVIN L. LYONS

“All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.”

These words from Shakespeare came to mind after I learned that Al Lyons had passed away. For Al was a man of many parts -- husband, brother, student, scholar, teacher, advisor, friend – and he played them all well.

I first met him not long after joining the Indiana University faculty. Having heard of declining standards in the academy, I was determined to be tough. But into one of my first classes came Al Lyons. No matter how much work I piled on, Al always rose to the task. After a bravura performance in one of my courses, I ran up the white flag and gave him an “A+,” a grade I have rarely given since.

Refuting the adage that those who can do and those who can’t teach, Al excelled not only in the practice of fund-raising, but also in studying and teaching it. He was in the initial class of a new doctoral program in philanthropic studies that I directed. To be honest, the faculty was more or less designing the program as we went along. We did not have much idea about what our graduates could do with their degrees either.

That did not seem to bother Al. He did exceptionally well in class, erring only in deciding on a dissertation requiring supervision by economists, thus guaranteeing delay in reaching a conclusion. With his classmates, he helped define a new field and make it respectable for students in the future.

During this period, my closest collaboration with Al occurred. Together, we worked on developing something called “social entrepreneurship,” a way of thinking about philanthropy and business that emphasizes not how they differ, but what they have in common.

It was a challenging task. Careers, reputations, and curricula often rested on seeing the world divided into three parts: government, business, and the non-profit sector. SPEA and the Kelley School of Business had never even collaborated educationally, I was told. But with Al at my side, we were able to overcome the obstacles and create a program that enables students to prepare themselves for the philanthropic world of the future.

Al was always working closely with his students. I frequently saw him, at the end of a long day of teaching, huddled with two or three students in the SPEA atrium, going over some new initiative they were working on. They will miss him, and so will I.

Too soon, alas, the curtain has come down for Al. He has played his final scene, one which, Shakespeare tells us, “ends in oblivion.” But on this occasion, the Bard is wrong. For Al Lyons has not disappeared from our lives. He will always live in the memories not only of those here today, but of countless others, especially those students who learned so much from him.

Leslie Lenkowsky