

Richard I. Lauf Memorial

When Rich Lauf joined our Club's proverbial "Celestial Branch" in March of this year, he had been a member of our terrestrial manifestation for fourteen years. In those years, Rich brought the prodigious number of sixteen papers, comprised of three full papers, eleven budget papers, and two trustee papers.

The first thing one learns from reading Rich's Literary Club papers is that he was a man of broad interests, an inquiring mind, and a rigorous intellect. His well-researched and masterfully written papers covered a wide range of subjects, including 18th century India, International Monetary Policy, personal recollections of family life, his experiences in the Vietnam War, the workings of a paper manufacturing plant, 16th century Italian opera, the follies of bureaucracy, the medical system and ruminations about death and dying.

Another thing one can learn from his papers is that Rich could tell a funny story.

In one of Rich's earliest papers, titled *Boom, Bubble and Bust*, he told the tale of how a throw-away joke on The Johnny Carson Show caused a nationwide run on toilet paper, the production of which was Rich's job at that time with Procter & Gamble. In this paper, he introduced us to his devilish implementation of the double-entendre. Examples include: "I saw an industry straining and grunting to keep up with demand..., this shortage would strike at the very seat of human existence..., toilet paper consumers would soon be chaffing at the inconvenience of it all..., inventory was wiped out." Everyone groaned with delight.

In *The Risks of War*, Rich told us of the hilarious and ill-conceived attempt by his Army unit in Vietnam to dispose of latrine waste by using artillery powder charges to blow it sky high. Gravity ensured that what went up came down in a hail of bio-weapon friendly fire.

While Rich amused us with humor throughout his papers, he also touched upon the Pathos of life, most notably in a trilogy of budget papers he brought for Memorial Day in 2019. In *One Lousy Day*, Rich described his near-death encounter with the enemy while on patrol, during which he suffered a grievous injury that earned him a one-way ticket home. The second of the three papers was *The Honored Dead*, wherein Rich memorialized two young friends who tragically did not make it home. The final paper, *As He Lay Dying*, chronicled with great sensitivity and tenderness the last days of his father's life, where we learned of the genesis of Rich's deep, lifelong love of opera and music.

Opera took center stage in his paper *The Demands of Art*, in which Rich recounted the horrible history of the Castrati, those young pre-pubertal boys who, to maintain their high-pitched singing voices, were castrated. While evoking well-justified revulsion to the act of castrating those young boys, Rich's paper also informed us with great detail about the social history surrounding this barbaric

practice during the two hundred years it existed.

Rich had a deep passion for The Literary Club. In *The Bengal Club*, he told the story of Sir William Jones, an 18th-century polyglot who, in addition to being a member of Samuel Johnson's London club, also founded a club in Calcutta, which still exists, to study all facets of Asian culture. Rich thought active participation in clubs like ours "... underline(s) the importance a convivial gathering of intelligent and engaged men can play in encouraging and facilitating intellectual growth." Rich embodied that Ethos of our Club to a degree worthy of emulation.

Even though we can learn a great deal about Rich through the subject matter of his papers, we can also learn something about him by how he approached Literary Club papers. His prose was clear, concise, and crisp. His reading was simultaneously melodic and forthright. For many of us, his willing and enthusiastic discussion of papers' content, structure, editing, and delivery continues to inform our Literary Club experience.

After his brush with death in the jungle of Vietnam, Rich determined that he would live life to the greatest extent possible. And he did. His joie de vivre influenced The Literary Club and all who knew him. Although Rich's booming laughter is now a faint echo, we can still hear his voice in his papers. So, from time to time, we should avail ourselves of what he wrote for us and rediscover the generous gifts he gave to us.

Thomas J. Murphy Jr.

Presented on October 3, 2022

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