

## Till the End of Time

January 30, 2006

Frank H. Mayfield, Jr.

Good summations, well conducted closings, often contribute to remembering those things deserving of the memory. Ted Koppel's final "Nightline," this last November, serves as an example. Koppel chose to revisit the deceased Morrie Schwartz, his former professor, by excerpting broadcasts from ten years earlier. The dying Professor Schwartz had talked candidly about his disease, Lateral Sclerosis, his pending demise, and that death was to be his final project. He suggested the difference between life and death can be quite small, once satisfaction with life's purpose is achieved. The Professor's assessment was simple. A person makes memories, and if those memories are held with warm feelings and shared generously, the person lives on, inside others, and never really goes away.

Professor Schwartz's notion aroused memory of a particularly poignant happening that occurred forty years ago in this city. Up till now, it has remained unreported, a private happening, known to a few. Today, liberated by the death of its principal character and with the comfort of time, this little snip of Cincinnati history yearns to see the light of day. What better ears to record such a memory, than the usually receptive ones at The Literary Club ...so here we go.

The curtain goes up in the mid sixties. The Juvenile Court of Hamilton County was among the model courts in the country. A long tradition of being in the national forefront was being continued under the stewardship of Judge Benjamin Schwartz. And parenthetically (Judge Schwartz and Professor Schwartz are not connected).

Judge Schwartz was an innovative public servant and had qualified his Court and the County for one of the Bob Hope Houses, an enlightened new concept in helping wayward boys, better known today as the Hope Academy. Mr. Hope selected cities to share his ample influence and resources by their capacity for fund raising and the quality of infrastructure in its juvenile court system.

Cincinnati's significant fund raising events occurred in May of 1966. The televised double-hitter included a golf event at Kenwood Country Club and a concert at Music Hall. Bob Hope attracted big timber. In addition to himself, he called upon his reciprocating pals, Arnold Palmer and Perry Como, to join the festivities.

At the golf club, possibly 15,000 spectators lined the fairways. Twelve fortunate Cincinnatians were to play three holes with the Headliners. Most were

senior business leaders and local celebs, like Paul Dixon and Waite Hoyt. As it was, one of the twelve, enjoyed neither rank nor celebrity, and if not for his link to Judge Schwartz and the Judge's magnanimity, walking down the fairway side by side with Perry Como, would never have happened. Mr. Como asked the young chap, what was his business and he replied, "a jailer for Judge Schwartz." In more diplomatic circles, the position was known as a detention officer, but Perry Como seemed amused to be playing with a jailer and wasted no time sharing the information with Bob Hope. Hope inquired the jailer's handicap, and upon the answer. Hope declared, "far too high" and proceeded to step on the poor jailer's ball. Como challenged Hope for messing with his partner, and the gallery loved all the antics.

Early evening the same day, Judge Schwartz hosted a fine supper affair at the Gourmet Room, atop the Terrace Hilton, for his **three special guests**, along with twenty other very lucky friends of the Judge. Whether by chance or the Judge's engineering, the young jailer found himself seated next to Perry Como who seemed pleased by the match-up once again. Showtime at sold-out Music Hall was 8:00 pm, and the event planner announced to the assembled group that Messers Hope, Como, Palmer, plus their entourages and Judge Schwartz were to depart for Music Hall at 7:30 pm sharp.

During the first course of the *experiance gastronomique*, Mr. Como asked the jailer, somewhat in a hush, if per chance, he knew of the Fountain Square Hotel. Many Cincinnatians, even back then, were not too familiar with the hotel, and might even have difficulty placing it in their minds-eye. The hotel was separated from the grand Gibson Hotel, only by the Albee Theater. It had fallen into decline and appeared from a distance, like the weather-beaten tugboat sidled to a majestic ocean liner. Located on the west comer of Fountain Square South, discriminating business folks departing the east portico of the Carew Tower Arcade would not give a second glance at the Fountain Square Hotel, standing just across the street.

Despite the hotel's decaying circumstances, on this given night, Perry Como was expressing an interest. With confidence growing in their relationship, for whatever reason, Mr. Como asked his seatmate if he could per chance arrange a clandestine visit to the Fountain Square Hotel after the **big show**. His new friend replied, "maybe"... he would try and assured discretion. At that point Mr. Como modestly confided, "Probably, no one knows, or need care, but my first paid gig was here in Cincinnati in '33 at the Fountain Square Hotel, I remember and still care."

The Fountain Square Hotel had been constructed in 1927 and was apparently a hot spot, appearing in numerous newspaper articles over its first twenty years.

When the waiter presented the *mousse au chocolate*, Mr. Como laughed with "they don't know of this in my hometown they are still trying to make desert out of meatballs." Perry Como, a naturally infectious fellow, leaned close and discreetly conveyed, "here is my buddy's room number at the Gibson, if you can call at eleven, he is a great guy, he will make the arrangements. Thanks much."

While the big doings at Music Hall were in progress, the jailer scurried to make it happen. He called family friend. West Shell, the can-do real estate facilitator, who ably accomplished the necessary, and joined his young friend at the Hotel Gibson mere minutes before 11:00 o'clock. The connection was made, and in thirty minutes four folks were walking down Fifth Street, past the classic Albee Theater. Just like the Fountain Square Hotel, the Albee too, was not far in years from an aggressive wrecking ball of regeneration.

On entering the bleak hotel lobby, Mr. Como pointed to where was once the Olympic Bar, the Coffee Shop.... "great 15 cent peanut butter sandwiches," he said. To the more expansive room, clearly once for dining and entertainment, the door had been difficult to open, a single hanging light bulb was lit, and there was a stage, many cobwebs. Perry Como stepped up and turned, looking to those in company. "My salary was \$28 a week, Freddie Carlone's band, I auditioned in Cleveland, nervous bus ride I remember...to Cincinnati... my opening song ...do you remember the title, Nick?"... "No **Perro**, tell us," Nick replied, "It was ... If You Were the Only Girl... Roselle, my girl, my only girl in the beginning too, she made me sing for both of our suppers. Roselle stands with me, I have told her about this little place many times ... I wish she was here." Roselle and Perry had been married for thirty-three years in 1966.

It was as if... he was having a conversation with his wife. He began humming ... a melody ... ever softly... allowing some of the words.

Till the end of time 'long as stars are in the blue  
Long as there's a spring, a bird to sing, I'll go on loving you.  
Till the end of time. 'long as roses bloom in May.  
My love for you will grow deeper with every passing day.  
Till the wells run dry and each mountain disappears  
I'll be there for you, to care for you, through laughter and through tears.  
So, take my hand in sweet surrender, and tenderly say that I'm  
The one you'll love and live for, till the end of time.

Lovely words ... warm memory... like the kind Professor Schwartz referred, when suggesting... the person lives on, inside others, and never really goes away.