

WALTER PHILIP HERZ

1924 - 2012

Robert W. Dorsey June 11, 2012

On June 3, 2012, the life of Walter P. Herz was celebrated within the warm acoustics of the First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, home of the Linton Music Series. The setting was fitting for Walter who loved his church and all music, including opera and especially Wagner. The selections for the occasion were uplifting: *Amazing Grace*, *I Believe*, and a rousing conclusion of *Joyful, Joyful*, with words by Henry van Dyke, set to *Ode to Joy* from the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Joy was expressed in the words of daughter, Deborah, who traveled from her home in Costa Rica to eulogize her father. She movingly and tearfully described a Walter few of us knew. We recall a quiet, reserved, courtly gentleman with knowledge on a broad range of subjects. Debi told of a fun-loving Dad with a sharp teasing wit who regaled her and Suzanne with wonderful anecdotes on drives to ballet lessons, and surreptitious stops for cheesy, greasy pizza, a food forbidden at home. Debi described his passion for poetry and his stanzas regularly written for wife, Betty; as well as his insistence on his girls' good writing, speaking and grammar.

Walter's celebration had a Literary Club flavor. The imposing stone church was designed by James W. McLaughlin, important nineteenth century architect and one time literarian. A sensitive latter-day addition was produced by James Alexander, former president of our Club, whose own memorial service was held there five years ago, with Walter in attendance. A bronze plaque honors William Howard Taft, church member and Club member.

Walter was very much the Urban Unitarian Universalist, espousing its credo of a continuing search for truth, a reverence for the life force, and respect for the dignity of every person seeking fulfillment. Walter was particularly interested in social justice in racial matters. He carried this spirit into the public arena in Plainfield, New Jersey, where he served on boards and commissions and then, dissatisfied with progress, ran for city council in the town of 50,000. He lost in a close election but was philosophical about it. We can imagine him musing Tennyson's, "Tis better to have loved and lost, Than never to have loved at all." His public spirit remained un-dampened. Walter was a life-long writer and his output broadly eclectic, church history, family memories, and biography including, remarkably, Millard Fillmore.

Walter's writings for the Club included papers about early racial and educational issues in Cincinnati, with discussions about Peter H. Clark, son of a Kentucky slave woman and probably her white master. Peter rose to prominence in local educational and civic circles and worked for quality education for minorities in Cincinnati's segregated schools. The paper, *Eighth and Plum*, delved into the bible wars over required reading of the King James Bible in the public schools. There were sometimes bitter debates in which ten of the fourteen leading protagonists were members of the Literary Club.

Walter's most illuminating offerings were *Soren's War*, a segment of Herb Curry's budget in 1999, and *The Lengthened Shadow* about his maternal grandfather, a ground-breaking physician in New York. The title, *Soren's War*, was taken from the Swedish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard who stated that what happens to one may be understood by looking back. Walter looked back in a self-effacing paper to the lessons of youth. Fresh out of New Rochelle High School, he enrolled in the U.S. Navy's V-I program at Harvard where that service was stockpiling young potential officer candidates to avoid having the army draft all able bodied

men. Walter wrote jokingly that he was stockpiled for six semesters, as the war went on and the Navy figured what to do with all the V-Is. Finally came special training and then attachment to a minesweeper where the young wet-behind-the-ears ensign had difficulty coping with the veteran seamen who had survived a Kamikazi attack. One recalls Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*. On a second assignment, a more mature Walter began honing his skills that would serve him well in corporate life

The Lengthened Shadow (borrowed from Emerson) allowed Walter to express the pleasures of living proximate to New York City and the opportunities for lunches with his beloved "Gramp" in the Oak Room at the Plaza. His descriptions of his forebear, Doctor Maurice J. Lewi, and the setting of their meetings have a lyrical quality. Later Walter and Betty celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at the Plaza.

Walter was a born and bred Easterner who came to Cincinnati in the 1990s following a business career primarily with Johnson and Johnson's Ethicon Corporation, where he was a board member. He and Betty wished to be closer to their offspring. Sadly Susanne died two years ago. Daughter Debi stated how much Walter enjoyed the Literary Club which he joined in 1998. Its breadth of membership provided a cultural link to his earlier years. He was regular in attendance until health issues precluded mobility. He and Betty observed their 61st wedding anniversary on May 6. Death came on May 19, at age 87. Many of us fondly remember the smiling countenance and gracious demeanor of a true gentleman.