

Ted Gleason Memorial

Since Ted Gleason and I had grown up together in Boston, and remained close friends, Charlin and I were thrilled when we learned in 1995 that Anne and he were moving to Cincinnati so Ted could head Herb Thompson's Forward Movement for our Episcopal Diocese.

And I quickly remembered how I had sought Ted's advice way back in 1966, when we were both 34, and I had just been appointed the Head of a prestigious single sex church boarding school in Hudson, Ohio, called Western Reserve Academy, and he had become the Chaplain at the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire.

The only reason that Ted and I had these big jobs at such an early age was that this was at the height of the Vietnam War, and distinguished heads all over the country were being destroyed by that terrible conflict's domestic counter-culture. And the time-honored selective service drafts that had been taken for granted and united our country during World Wars 1 and 2 and Korea were succumbing to fierce political pressures on college campuses and at partisan conventions.

There were growing and legitimate mistrust of authority, God is dead, psychedelic and other drugs, racial tensions, sexual experimentation, technological innovation, and the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, that have forever changed our nation, yet they were happening at the same time that senior faculties, proud graduates and apprehensive townspeople were stubbornly determined to hold on to long-standing traditions such as single sex enrollments, early bedtimes for mid to late teen adolescent boarders, strict dress codes and compulsory chapels.

And since Ted was becoming acclaimed at Exeter for addressing these issues in progressive ways with which his constituents were beginning to feel comfortable, I had made a trip there to take a look at what he was doing.

Exeter's current Chaplain is an African-American who was Ted's student, and he remembers that well: "He led us through a profound transformation from mandatory church attendance to voluntary religious expression and inspired a more inclusive and vibrant spiritual environment that we think still exists. His broad definition has enabled us to house many religions in a building of Christ. Ted knew what was the right thing to do, and, because he did it so well, it made everything that happened afterward possible. He carried with him a power of the soul, and he blessed me with his bestowal of approval and understanding."

For years, at 38, Ted became the Head of the Noble and Greenough School near Boston, which all educators consider to be one of the best schools in the country. He served there for 16 years, which was an eternity during Vietnam.

Nobles has had only six heads in its 105 year history, and 35 of its 100 graduates last June are freshmen in the ten most selective colleges in the country, including 9 at Harvard.

By chance, Nobles is embarking on a capital campaign this spring. The Board Chair remembered Ted when she kicked it off: "I still trace a direct line from him to the young faculty he attracted and retained, who became the school's instrumental, transformative leaders over the past four decades."

Nobles' current Head is a product of Ted's tenure, and he wrote me this: "When he came, he rolled the dice for the first time in Nobles' history, and said we have to be different. He taught two sections of religion, and knew every kid. He made the school coeducational, and achieved full sexual parity in five years. He significantly increased our racial and religious diversity. He wrote a mission statement that was pure Ted, built around the notion that a great school has to be an

extended family, a statement he regularly read beautifully: " Noble and Greenough will be a school where one can develop the mind, the body and the spirit for a life of service. After Leaving Nobles, Ted spent ten years at his beloved Virginia Theological Seminary, as its development director, where he continued to teach religion, and raised more money than anyone had before, or has since.

After moving here in 1995, Ted spent ten years revitalizing the Forward Movement Publications, and joined our Club in 1996, reading seven distinguished papers, before retiring and moving to Washington in 2006 to be close to two of Anne's and his daughters. He moved to Associate membership in 2012, and resigned last year when his health was letting him down.. He died following a fall in December.

Ted's papers were masterfully crafted, as one would expect of a prominent educator. They were always introspective and insightful, and invariably reflected his keen sensitivity to the needs of others. Ted was, first and last, a true gentleman with courtly grace and manners. Some of us were privileged to enjoy his superb gourmet cooking, served at tables lovingly set by Anne with truly elegant china, silver and crystal. These were evenings not to be forgotten.

We were a better club with Ted as a member.

The Literary Club of Cincinnati
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Gibby Carey and peter Briggs