

Paul Hurd – My Brother, My Friend, My Colleague

My first encounter with Paul Hurd was an observance from afar. It was 1966 and I was a 12-year old 7th grade stow-away on a school bus to South China, Maine eager to watch Hyde School's very first football game up at Erskine Academy. With only 60 boys in the whole school, I had no idea what to expect. But my spirits lifted in the early going when this postgraduate senior from Woolwich, Maine – some guy named Hurd – caught a touchdown pass, scoring Hyde's very first points of any kind in an athletic contest. While I was elated by the fact that we went on to win that one, little did I know the extent to which Paul's and my paths would intersect in the years... the decades ahead.

That touchdown was not the only "first" that occurred between Hyde and Paul Hurd. In fact, it wasn't even the first "first." That one can be found in a simple notation in Paul's file: "1st candidate for admission interviewed at Hyde School."

Reviewing Paul's original application for admission in 1966, I was struck by two brief comments in the Teacher Recommendations section. One of his academic teachers wrote:

"He needs to develop self-confidence and a **realistic** viewpoint about his abilities and his life's work."

On that same application, a guidance counselor wrote, "I feel this boy should attend college, but he also needs to acquire a more **realistic** outlook."

Hmmm... that word... Re-ah-lis-tic... Standing here today, I'm confident to say that all of us present are grateful for Paul's choice to disregard the advice of these well-intentioned teachers. Paul didn't really do realistic... He never wavered on pushing the boundaries of unrealistic expectations... on us OR on himself.

If it is true that the most accurate measure of the ultimate impact of your life can be determined by how many people show up at your funeral... well... Paul, You Done Good. (Hey, re-ah-lis-tic doesn't draw this kind of crowd.)

Paul's and my paths crossed again a decade later when I caught wind that my college-aged sister Laurie was dating some Hyde faculty member who was considerably older than she was. I was not a fan of the idea and pretty much adopted the stance of "this too shall pass." Not quite. A few months later I got a

call from Laurie who excitedly announced, “I’m getting married!” I hit a bad note when I responded, “Really?... To whom?” I figured it was my job to toss a firecracker into her state of bliss to make sure she was certain that Paul was the right one. (I mean, aren’t big brothers supposed to do that?)

Since everyone in my family seemed to be in favor of the impending nuptials, I took it upon myself to play Devil’s Advocate. I managed to make Paul feel pretty uncomfortable in those early months. But what drove me nuts was his reaction: Ever the gentleman, he was nothing but friendly and polite with me about everything, no matter what I did. He was so nice to me that I really began to feel guilty. He seemed to regard me with a perpetual state of unconditional forgiveness. It was nerve-wracking! In spite of myself, we became close friends.

While I could talk about many things that we did, I’d like to single out **Surfing**. We did a lot of it. Once he became old enough, Zach joined us on memorable safaris, chasing that perfect wave and living that happy-go-lucky dream captured so well by Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys. We went to Costa Rica. We surfed the California coast – Santa Cruz, La Jolla, Del Mar, Capitola – and we surfed the East Coast from St. Augustine on through Hampton Beach and up to our home break of Popham, just down the road from here, where I’m fairly certain we were often the northern-most surfers on the Atlantic Ocean. This summer we transitioned to Stand Up Paddling. Special times.

And again, there was that *gentleman* thing. His manners, his dress, his interactions, the way he carried himself. I went out and bought a suit for this occasion precisely because I was going to be speaking about him. Paul taught me that there are just certain things that have to be done the right way.

If you are here today, it’s a safe bet that Paul touched your life as a teacher... What is great teaching, anyway? I came across two quotes that reminded me of Paul... almost. After offering them here, I’d like to tweak them ever so slightly to better fit Paul. First, there’s poet Robert Frost, a New Englander that Paul and I both admired. He said, “There are two kinds of teachers: the kind that fill you with so much quail shot that you can’t move, and the kind that just gives you a little prod behind and you jump to the skies.”

That comes very close to Paul, except for one thing: Paul's gift was not limited to the "little" prod. In fact, he was downright masterful with the **B-i-g** Prod. Either way, he helped 100s... make that 1000s... of kids and parents jump to the skies.

The second quote comes from James Garfield, one of our more obscure Presidents, a factoid that would have appealed to Paul, the historian. Speaking to a group of fellow Williams College alumni over a century ago, Garfield described the ideal college as Williams founder "Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other." As with the Frost quote, I would amend this slightly to apply to Paul:

"The ideal school has Paul Hurd sitting at a dining room table alongside a student." He sat with any student who wanted to sit with him. He also sat with many a student who did NOT want to sit with him. Either way, he approached each and every one with commitment, wisdom, and love.

As I said to a newspaper reporter this week, "Should Hyde ever establish a Teaching Hall of Fame, Paul is a shoo-in first ballot selection." But rather than take my word for it, I would like to share a few selected comments from those that overflowed our email server this week.

There were some great one-liners:

- A 1990 alumna wrote, "I'll remember you as the Attitude Whisperer."
- A 1993 alum: "He was as tough as they come, yet tender and kind."
- A 2005 Woodstock alumna: "Not all heroes wear capes. R.I.P., Mr. Paul Hurd. You changed the world."

Some comments affectionately played back some of Paul's classic lines. A 2004 alumna wrote: "Now I know I'm going to get this wrong, so someone please correct me, but we have to promise Mr. Hurd that we will never be at the airport, with a train ticket, waiting for our ship to come in."

There have been a number of messages with recurring themes. Perhaps the most common one was embodied in a note from a 2006 alum: "The Paul Hurd news hit

me like a punch in the stomach... The man believed in me when I did not, and I feel honored and fortunate to have known him.”

We heard from **teachers** who were inspired by Paul. A member of the Class of 2005 wrote, “In honor of the greatest educator I've ever known in hopes that I can become even half as good a teacher as this man was.”

A former colleague wrote: “Paul touched so many lives in so many ways. An inspirational mentor, he is one of the reasons I stayed in education. His ability to challenge us all to grow and never settle for mediocrity was unique and powerful.”

And finally, as if to summarize all of the above, an alumnus from the Class of 1973, also a former member of the Board of Governors, wrote:

One of the things that endeared people to Paul was the fact that he tended to have more confidence in the abilities of others than they possessed about themselves. His "time to step it up" exhortation was rooted in the belief that we were all capable of doing more and being better than our past experiences seemed to suggest. Unlike the vast majority of people who tend only to see the seeds and soil in their lives, Paul was imbued with an ability to envision the gardens those combined elements could become.

These remarks are just the tip of the iceberg. The outpouring of support and love has been overwhelming. But I want to give the last word to Paul himself. While gathering my thoughts for this tribute, I came across the hand-written essay he wrote in 1966 on his application for admission to Hyde. Although reflecting the gender specificity of a pre-co-educational America, I choose to offer it here in raw and unedited form, just as he wrote it then:

I feel that perhaps the greatest obligation man has during his life upon this earth is that of understanding and knowing himself. It is certainly a hard obligation to meet and it is all too easily overlooked; I cannot pretend to say that this duty can be accomplished in one year or even one lifetime. But man's struggle to realize his individual and collective potential must go on if the human race's supremacy is expected to persist in this world.

Therefore, I must say that the idea of learning more about myself as an individual and in relation to others is foremost in my mind as I apply for

admission to Hyde. I hope that the school will be able to lend me not only new respect for my own abilities, but new respect for the abilities of others.

The student's obligation to his school is a rather hard thing to define. In my case, however, I feel it would be my duty to try to completely devote myself to the ideals which the school sets for its students, and to try to emulate those ideals throughout life.

I'd like to read that last sentence once more: *I feel it would be my duty to try to completely devote myself to the ideals which the school sets for its students, and to try to emulate those ideals throughout life.*

So, Paul, I think what all of us are trying to say is: 1) THANKS and... 2) "You The Man."

And Paul... Wherever you are, I'm counting on you to continue our shared quest for that perfect wave. And when you find that swell, hopefully one breaking at 4-6 feet and glassy... Save us a spot in the line-up.