

In Memory of Jerry Zaslove

Gary Teeple

Jerry had very many good friends, and even more acquaintances. And all of us can consider ourselves fortunate to have been enriched by his friendship. Everyone was warmed by his concern for others, the selfless sacrifice of his time, the sharing of his breadth of reading and depth of understanding.

A few years ago, he sent me a short 6-page rumination on the 50th anniversary of Simon Fraser University, which he must have sent to many others. It is entitled, “**An Homage to Brecht’s *Mother Courage*: An Alma Mater Story, For Simon Fraser University 50 Years in the Aftermath – A Memento Mori.**” Brecht and SFU, I think it fair to say, represented two key concerns for Jerry. Brecht’s play (*Mother Courage*) is about profiting from conflict, but Brecht more broadly represented the use of the arts to engage in social change; and the early idealism of SFU represented the pursuit of knowledge as an end-in-itself. Jerry had tried to advance this idealism by participating as a mediator in the disputes at SFU that marked its opening years.

In the end, that conflict was left to wither away, more or less unresolved, leaving forever a dark spot on the administration of SFU. But over the next few years Jerry seemed to continue the search for the lost dream that SFU once promised, and to this end he began to raise funds for the development of a Humanities program, which subsequently became a department and an institute. Roughly about the same time, he also negotiated an agreement with Margaret Morgan to fund the establishment of a Labour Studies Program at SFU. I always understood these projects of Jerry’s as his surreptitious efforts to create spaces for the experiments in alternative education that SFU originally promised but with which it never followed through.

Both Brecht and SFU failed to realize their ideals, which were ultimately left in frozen forms. Brecht's plays ended like preserves in a jar, to be tasted and commented on but never to live again as he intended; and SFU was subordinated to career administrators, assisting step by step the process of the privatization and commercialization of the university. If those were the fates of Brecht and SFU—for the arts and education—now largely commercialized and past hope of any “return,” they were, for Jerry, the “memento mori” of these two concerns of his. But he never lost hope, as we saw in his considerable efforts to raise funds and promote the development of the arts and humanities—and labour studies.

SFU is a better place for having had Jerry. And this I would say is how he should be remembered: the hope that he maintained despite the privatization of the institution and commercialization of the arts, now taken as normal. His life and legacy should stand as a reminder to us of the lost social ideals of art and education, and as motivation and inspiration for our own work.

He has left us, but he left behind more than he would imagine. At journey's end, who can say they made the path more interesting and worthwhile for as many as him.

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