

IN MEMORIAM

REMEMBERING GEOFFREY ISHERWOOD

February 9, 1937 – July 17, 1998

Mrs. Judy Isherwood and family, Principal Shapiro, Dean Ghosh, Faculty, staff and friends. It is my sincere honour to speak to you today in memory of Geoffrey Isherwood. For many of you he was friend, colleague, and regarded as a highly accomplished scholar. For many of today's Quebec field school administrators he was our most important teacher. For countless others and myself especially, Professor Isherwood was a graduate student's best friend, mentor, and professional icon.

I had the great good fortune of being a Geoff Isherwood graduate student. This is not said lightly. "Geoff," as he was known, was an accomplished "everything" in the field of education. With his over 46 publications; 89 conference presentations; field experience as a secondary school teacher and principal; and being involved in 34 professional development programs, he was a visionary in the field of educational administration. This past June, he was honoured by CASEA, The Canadian Society for the Study of Educational Administration, as a recipient of the 1998 Distinguished Service Award. I quote from the citation:

A constant, valued and influential presence in the life of our association, thoughtful, modest and gently provocative, a developer of others' talents, extraordinarily active for his entire career of educational administration in Canada – this is Geoff Isherwood.

Geoff for many years taught the "Foundations of Educational Administration" course – which for many of us field practitioners was the most important course in the Educational

Administration program. He taught this course year after year with vigor and fun. Where many survey courses are deemed as necessary evils – his was not. He brought into all his courses those human elements of relevance, ethics, and values – such crucial foundational elements of education. His knowledge, experience, and wisdom continually inspired his students and colleagues.

He believed in education, good teachers, and good administrators. He ceaselessly devoted hours and hours to the development of administrators at all levels. From his involvement in the nationally acclaimed Canadian Educational Association Short Course in Educational Leadership at Banff to his School Board Development project with the Inuit and Kativik school commissions to his famed school board-like simulations in his classes, Geoff's dedication and commitment to learning and teaching were nothing less than extraordinary.

I would like to share with you some personal experiences which I feel best represents Geoff's stature as a great teacher and human being. My association with Geoff goes back some ten years. He was my advisor and mentor for both my M.Ed. and Ph.D. degrees in what was formerly known as the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies and the Department of Educational Studies. At Geoff's insistence, I wrote a play for my Master's degree monograph that depicted an independent school in crisis. He felt that I should find a way to bridge the performing arts with Educational Administration for he believed that the field itself had come to a standstill in research methodologies. In the following year, Geoff organized the play's presentation at the CASEA annual conference at Carleton University. As I found out later, it was a great risk – more for him than for me. The presentation went well. I was ecstatic. But for Geoff, it was a test – to see if the field would "tolerate" such an *avant garde* approach to research. We sat in the coffee shop at Carleton before returning to Montreal. He did not dance around the subject. He encouraged me to go for the Ph.D. He outlined all the struggles and uphill challenges I would have to face especially in light of the radical nature and

atypical research methodology of my work. He was undaunted in his support. From the beginning, he was there at every step, juncture, and breath. As you know, Geoff suffered a stroke just as he retired. Before my dissertation defense I had pleaded with him that his health was of prime concern and that he should not attend if it would put him into any further medical peril. His response was typically Geoff. "I wouldn't miss it for anything," and with a chuckle he said, "so you had better put on a great show!" At the defense Geoff struggled with his every verbal syllable to be perfectly clear in his questioning. I had never seen him so focused and concentrated. And wouldn't you know it, he asked me the most difficult question of the defense. This was Geoff Isherwood at his best. In the thick, the fray, and supporting his student 300% and then some.

For the past several years, Geoff believed that the field of educational research had come to an impasse. He strongly was convinced that the field had become too positivistic in orientation and too far away from the realities of the field practitioner. His search towards a more realistic application of research for the field practitioner led him into the realms of ethics and values – a sharp turn from his years as a quantitative oriented scholar. He took this belief to heart and chaired in 1997 a CASEA symposium which introduced "Emerging Approaches to the Study of Education." I quote from his remarks:

How can scholars argue that we must study administration from a values perspective without going on to detect and isolate key values in play in the practice of administration, the origins of those values, and the impact those values have on practice. . . . Through humanistic and artistic means we have an opportunity to come to grips with the practice of administration in context.

Alongside the flow-charts and statistical surveys, Geoff infused this sense of reality in both his classes and research by using many different communication mediums such as theatre and simulated judicial inquiries to stimulate his students or conference participants in their pursuit for truth, moral sense, and spiritual strength.

In fact, several years ago, I assisted Geoff in a workshop that he was animating with the Kativik School Board. It was amazing to see him quietly and effortlessly shepherd these northern educators and native council leaders, who were not graduate students or scholars, with their very special cultural and historical needs, into the world of the hard core political and administrative realities and requirements of today's Quebec school boards. For a non-native to have the respect and confidence of these cultural and community leaders as he guided them in this quest was heartwarming and very special.

Earlier I mentioned that many of us saw Geoff as an icon. His spirit, soul, and entire being were dedicated to promoting integrity within the field, service to his university, honesty in teaching, and mentoring to his students. We can honour Geoff and his legacy to teaching and scholarship by striving to insure that these ideals be our guiding principles of professionalism in the most honourable of professions – education.

“Good stuff Geoff, Good stuff.”

MATTHEW J. MEYER. *St. George's High School*

This eulogy was delivered at the September 23, 1998, Faculty of Education Assembly, Jack Cram Auditorium, McGill University.