

REMEMBERING GARY

Ellen Ellickson*

Gary and I first met on a blind date in 1965. We saw each other a few times, but the dating never worked. The friendship did. We became interested in other people but remained special friends. We did special things together. Once he took me to dinner at the home of Judge and Mrs. J. Skelly Wright. In their stately dining room, we had a hearty Monday night meal of red beans and rice. The two men were chatting—indeed, chattering—at the end of the table. Mrs. Wright looked at them fondly and said to me, “Skelly and Gary are like *this,*” and she made the sign of closeness, her forefinger and middle finger locked together. “Like *this*,” she said.

I felt that Gary and I were like *this* too and I never once lost that feeling. My getting married and having children did nothing to our friendship except strengthen it. Living in separate parts of the country made no difference, nor did the passing of time. Through the years, when we met or talked on the phone, we picked up right where we had left off the last time. We talked about everything. Movies, travel, people, books, law, music, sports, politics, you name it. Gary was interested in everything, he could talk about everything, he could talk interestingly about everything. He made sure that connections between himself and his friends were always strong, were constantly renewed. He had a talent for friendship.

That talent was never more evident than during the last two months of his life. In that period I called him every day, usually around eight o'clock in the evening my time, five in the afternoon in Los Angeles. Often the line was busy, and often, even if Gary answered, he couldn't talk because his hospital room, and later his house, were filled with the visitors he was always so pleased to see. But much of the time he was available to talk, and talk he did. He talked about how happy he was to receive the loving attention of family and friends. He talked about his illness. Gary knew what was most likely in store for him, but he made the conscious decision to put fear aside as much as he could and to face family and friends with cheerfulness. “It's easier for others if I'm in good spirits,” he said, “and it's easier for me, too.” That's friendship for you. It is also courage.

I myself will need some form of courage to grow old without Gary. I realized after he died that I had always assumed that, no matter who else I

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would lose in my life, I would never lose him and that he and I, aged and bent, would be having dinner and going to a movie together and talking—indeed, chattering—until the end of time. It remains a constant astonishment to me that he is no longer here, enriching our world with his intellect, spicing it with his humor, sweetening it with his gentleness, anchoring it with his friendship. It remains a constant astonishment and an unending, aching sadness. How sad it is to have lost Gary—but how wonderful it was to have had him for a friend.