

Notes on Mike Rose

Lisa Moore

A farewell to Mike Rose on his unexpected death, this personal remembrance recounts Rose's generous guidance on the discipline for a new Comp/Rhet editor and his very human capacity for empathy and insight expressed by his devotion to the value of every person whatever their circumstances and the craft of writing.

I first met Mike Rose when I visited Elaine Maimon at Arizona State University-West, where she was Provost at the time, to introduce myself to her and discuss her book. Mike was speaking there at Elaine's invitation, and this, my first trip as a new editor for McGraw Hill, coincided with his lecture. I needed guidance on the various camps and personalities in writing studies, what the various approaches stood for, how they had emerged, who represented what approach, and who was leading the way in what a friend described as the Balkan discipline of rhetoric and composition (meaning, a dizzying array of diverse factions)—and whether he realized it or not Mike became one of my teachers. Elaine, Mort (Elaine's immediately engaging husband), Mike, and I all went out to dinner that night, and I got my first thrilling lesson on the democratic ideals of the discipline. I immediately read Mike's *Lives on the Boundary* and was hooked on what the discipline could stand for at its best. It was Mike, a textbook writer as well as a trade author himself, who told me to "get Duane Roen to write a book" and got a message to Duane that I wanted to talk to him about a book. Duane was kind enough to see me when I called (though it would take me several years to get Duane to agree to write the book, and only with the help of his future coauthors, Barry Maid and Greg Glau). Mike continued to champion the thinkers he hoped would shape the discipline (to me, as well as to others). And while I'm so grateful to Mike for all he taught me about the discipline, especially for my continuing friendship with Duane Roen, it was Mike's little idiosyncrasies that touched me most as I relied on his advice on various aspects of pedagogy or people.

When he discovered my daughter was having trouble learning to read in special education courses in elementary school, he immediately called a friend of his who lived near us and got a recommendation for a brilliant tutor to help her. He just couldn't abide the idea that any student would be written off the way my daughter had been. (My daughter is now in graduate school at Adelphi University for educational technology, after getting

her degree—with honors—from SUNY Purchase. Thank you, Mike.) Mike continued to the end to ask after her and beam with pride over her accomplishments. He was like that, I believe, with everyone. No one was unimportant. As others have remarked in various tributes that I read after his passing, he made everyone feel like their struggles and accomplishments were as important as anyone who was famous or powerful (no small thing in the middle of Santa Monica’s Hollywood culture). I remember him telling me once of a graduate student who had come in for orals and had brought a lasagna or some other kind of casserole for the occasion. The faculty who were there weren’t especially pleased with her thesis and were guiltily avoiding the gift of food she had brought, so Mike—to make her feel more welcome and appreciated—ate so much of it that he came home sick from overeating. He always believed in treating everyone with compassion, dignity, and respect.

When I had my own feelings of inadequacy, he would remind me, “You are Jack Moore’s daughter!”—knowing I had come from a towering figure of a father in a ranching family in Texas. It would always buck me up. He also had an abiding faith that work was redemptive. And in those moments where he reminded me of my roots, he would also tell me just to work at whatever I was concerned about and that work in itself would alleviate my anxiety. He believed, he told me, it was the engagement with work that gave life meaning and dignity. He himself was an example of that. Religious about writing, he often described it as painful and a misery, but he carved out a routine that gave him hours each day to focus on whatever work he was writing at the time. Nothing was to interfere with that precious time, not the phone, not email, not anything. No surprise, I guess, from a man who wrote extensively on the subject of writer’s block. He was a painstaking writer, laboring over each sentence until it was perfect. I sometimes felt he even edited himself as he spoke; he had a deliberate and certainly thoughtful delivery. It wasn’t a one-way street. I was happy to have been one of his readers on *The Mind at Work* when he was working on that book. And later, I was impressed that he managed to create a social media presence with his blog, given how little he really cared for the interruption of social media.

He also had a silly sense of humor, relishing in those little Christmas Santas that danced to Christmas music, and loved Day of the Dead paraphernalia, amassing quite a collection. He would delight in the first bloom of a plant he had on his balcony, and he liked to say “life is good” as he stood on Venice Beach where he lived for so long before his move to Santa Monica. To the end, what a humane voice he continued to be through his work but also through his little “d” democratic interactions. Just three weeks before he died, he had sent me his latest piece: an essay on how

science fiction had helped him survive a devastating childhood. He wanted me to share it with my husband, whose early career as an aspiring fantasy novelist had become overshadowed by the death of his sister.

And then, the news.

In big ways and small, Mike's legacy lives on not only in his own work, not only in the work he's influenced in others, not only in the careers he's nourished and promoted, but as a testimony to the spiritual significance in the everyday and how much that example can usefully guide us all to make a difference.

Lisa Moore has had an extensive career in higher education publishing, publishing numerous award-winning and best-selling text and technology projects. A co-founder of a publishing services consultancy *Glen Hollow, Ink.*, Moore has worked with numerous scholars on topics as varied as gender and communication, immigration, child trafficking in Africa, AIDS in the global South, medieval history, and, most recently, the politics of water. She divides her time between Brooklyn and a lovingly restored historic inn, Glen Hollow, in the Finger Lakes region of Upstate New York. Glen Hollow is an official partner to the Academy of American Poets, providing residencies to the winners of the Lenore Marshall Prize.

