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Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

Civil War Era Studies

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1-17-2012

## Anniversaries

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Rudy, John M., "Anniversaries" (2012). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 157.  
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## Anniversaries

### Abstract

It has been one year since the birth of this blog. Not one year since our first post. If you run back in our roll, the first post was February 1st 2011. Still, this blog was born on this day one year ago, or at least the ethic which leads me to post week in, week out was. I didn't even realize that fact until a few weeks ago. [*excerpt*]

### Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation

### Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

### Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

[www.civilwarconnect.com](http://www.civilwarconnect.com)



## Anniversaries

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2012**

John here... We're breaking the pattern today. I'll be posting thoughts today, Jake on Thursday this week.

It has been one year since the birth of this blog. Not one year since our first post. If you run back in our roll, the first post was February 1st 2011. Still, this blog was born on this day one year ago, or at least the ethic which leads me to post week in, week out was. I didn't even realize that fact until a few weeks ago.

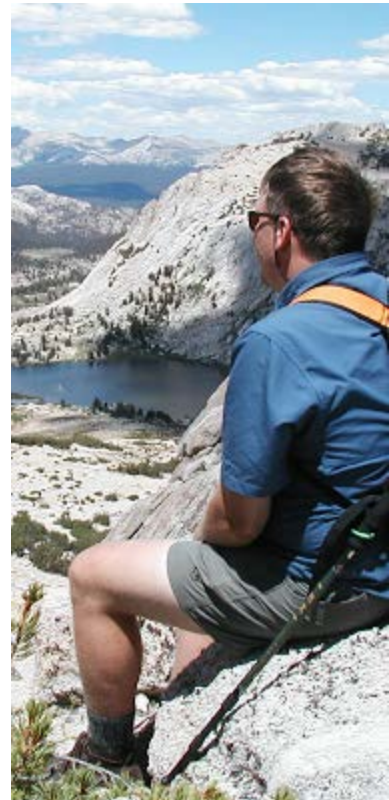
I was having a conversation with my Favorite Female Wordslinger about my work on the book on Gettysburg College's Civil War history. I've been plugging away at it for just under a year. I've been a little hurt that each time I finish a chapter and offer it to her to read and give me feedback, she rejects it. "Just give me the full manuscript when it's done." I didn't quite understand. So I broached the subject.

"Well, I thought it was just a phase: one of those things you go through, like all the other projects you started and then lost interest in. I didn't think you were serious about it," she candidly replied. She's right. I have projects which I begin research on, only to find a more salacious thread to follow.

It made me stop and think to myself: *why have I been this serious about this book project for so long? Why have I been doggedly fixated on posting at least once every week on this blog?*

A year ago today, my friend, mentor and boss Dave Larsen died. He was fifty. His heart gave out. Two in the morning, he stood up from his bed and collapsed on the floor. They tried to save him. It didn't work.

I got the text message at about 8:15 that morning from Melinda Day, the wonderful, talented Harpers Ferry historian and interpreter who introduced me to Larsen: "Urgent please call the house phone."



Larsen in Yosemite.

Mel usually doesn't have urgent news, at least not at 8am on Martin Luther King Day. I called as soon as I saw the text on my phone sitting on the bathroom sink overnight. Standing looking into the mirror, I heard Mel's voice. "I have very sad news to tell you. Dave Larsen died last night."

Mel sounded so strong, so resolute. This woman who had worked with Larsen in the National Park Service for decades, who grew up beside him as together with their friends they hashed out what interpretation was and what it could be, was calm. I didn't know how she did it, I still don't. There was an unwavering strength in her tone that morning.

I shattered.

In the days and weeks after the funeral, I realized that Dave had crafted an amazing legacy. His book [\*Meaningful Interpretation\*](#) is on the shelf of every interpreter worth their salt in America. When he died, the hearts of a good deal of the interpretive world collapsed.

Dave Larsen didn't die a year ago. In some sense, he lives on through the words he wrote, through the ideas he forged, through the way he changed the craft. He changed how we think about what we do.

Dave and I had conversations, long rambling free-form discussions on how interpretation works, when it doesn't work and how it could work someday. I guess to some extent that's what my posts over the last year have been. My sparring partner is gone. So now I try to mull over the ideas myself. I try to roll them around in my brain and see if anything of value shakes out. I don't know if it has or not. I hope so.

Doggedly posting each week, doggedly working on my book? Part of it is trying to have the same sort of impact on the world that Dave did. But part of it is about keeping him alive, too.

On my phone, I saved the last text message I ever got from Larsen. It's simple: "Back in a few."

