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THOUGHTS ABOUT MEL

Patrick A. Keenan[†]

L'Chaim!

To life. L'Chaim. My favorite of all the beautiful Hebrew words. I speak about life, and about our friend Mel.

It is written in the Book of Ecclesiastes that there is a time for everything under the sun.

A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to get and a time to lose.

A time to labor and a time to rest.

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

A time to sow and a time to harvest.

A time to be born, a time to live, and a time to die.

Mel's life and time is about living, laughing, dancing, healing, about both sowing and harvesting, about loving, and certainly about speaking, far, far more than about any of that other stuff.

And we come to celebrate that life, that splendid, blessed, exciting life. What an amazing impact our friend has on all of us, on the law school, on the legal profession, on this congregation, on the handicapped, on the world.

Our brother Mel is a man of passion. Passion about Paula, about his family, about his work, about his students, about his clients and causes, about his battles, about Pacer, about life.

Mel is twice, thrice blessed, with extraordinary gifts magnified by his generous willingness to share all of them, to give of himself, to enrich, provoke, challenge, excite and delight us—because he is Mel.

[†] The following is the text of a eulogy given by Professor Keenan at Professor Goldberg's funeral on September 1, 1998. The author is a professor of law at the University of Detroit Mercy. He received his J.D. from the University of Chicago in 1969, where he met Mel Goldberg. Professor Keenan was also a staff attorney with Cook County Legal Assistance while Mel was the director.

Cherish his smile and his style: this giant of a man, son of a shopkeeper, student of the Torah and of the Supreme Court, everyone's mensch, the godfather who always managed to look a bit like a pirate. Cherish Mel's voice, often gentle, always erudite, but with the ability to roar in that copyright tenor bred for the classroom, the courtroom, the soapbox, the pulpit. Cherish Mel's ability to motivate, intimidate, persuade, befriend, embrace, and win us over almost before we know it's happened.

Consider those elegant, eloquent eyebrows, bouncing upward on that massive freckled pate. One rises in suspicion; two to express surprise, or incredulity, nay shock, about any error, injustice, artifice or really bad answer in class.

Physically, Mel towers over most mere mortals. His intellect, curiosity, perseverance and fearlessness match his size. He is larger than life. Some of us view life as a process, something to be experienced, and perhaps today, merely endured. Not Mel.

Mel's life is a constant adventure: each day a new world to conquer, a new cause to advocate, a new project to advance, another foolish or erroneous argument to debunk, another injustice to be undone, and some ignorance or loneliness to be dispelled. And this is all his personal, self-imposed responsibility. A time to labor, a time to play, a time to laugh, and time to love.

Carpe diem.

Carpe diem. In the sixties, we used to wear it on sweatshirts. Some of us still do. But Mel didn't wear it on his shirt: it was emblazoned on his very soul.

Seize the day.

Grab it. Shake it. Squeeze every bit of life, of adventure, of action, of learning, of laughter, of love. Every single day.

Be joyful.

Don't just walk. Run. Charge. Dance. Tackle. Grab. Seize.

Don't just talk. Persuade. Shout. Sing. Banter. Discourse. Lecture. Pontificate. Pray. Teach!

Like so many in this room, I'm trained as a lawyer—in considerable part by Mel. Like several of my brother counsel speaking today, my family's heritage puts me in the Irish Catholic branch of the Goldberg clan. My tools are words. Yet words fail me when I

try to describe what Mel means to me, to Paula, to all of us. But let's try a few paltry labels anyway. So . . . hold in your hearts:

Mel the fighter, the advocate, the iconoclast, the rebel.

The storefront lawyer—on the nineteenth floor in Chicago's Loop.

The leader.

The man of faith. The student of the Torah.

The President of the Adath Jeshurun Congregation.

The professor.

The philosopher.

Consider Mel the arranger, the fixer, the traveler, the builder, the gearhead, the gadgeteer, the driver of Volvos, the fellow who gets the job done. The role model for every one whom is a lawyer, husband, father, or friend.

Mel the hospital patient, sometimes cooperative, often feisty, determined to be in control, to seize each day, each hour, each minute, to continue his blessed, incandescent, foreshortened life. He packed more living into his time than the rest of us who live to be four score or more. And thanks to those who helped Mel, and helped us, the most especially his colleague and special friend Bob Oliphant, and Barry Garfinkel, and the extended family.

On Sunday, Mel succumbed to the cruel disease that invaded that huge body, but never infected his spirit, never eroded his courage, never touched his mind, never encroached his essence, his power to relate, influence, inspire, and love all of us.

But these are just labels. Mere words.

Hold onto the man.

Consider Mel, Paula's loving husband, part of a marriage of miraculous good fortune—truly divine gift of our Lord God—that defined their life and work together. And Mel the father of David and Robert, sons who wrote the book on how to be loyal, how to love, how to make parents proud. Men in whom our friend lives on.

And Mel does live: in our hearts and souls; in his legacy and legends; in the stories of the glories, mostly true, told in the inns of court, the chambers, the watering holes, the hangouts, the mental hospitals, the halls of justice, the classrooms and the jails, where he will be always remembered.

Mel lives on. In Paula's, David's, and Robert and his family's love. And in our love. He lives in the empowerment of Pacer. In the strength of the Adath Jeshurun Congregation, and this magnificent building. He lives in the quality and tradition of the William Mitchell College of Law. In his enduring, pivotal and inescapable influence on the hundreds of students and lawyers he teaches, touches, chides, sculpts, and inspires.

Mel lives.

Carpe diem.

L'Chaim.

Thank you Mel.