

December 30, 2008

Dear Valerie,

The news of Barbara's passing away was very sad and upsetting to me, but I very much appreciate your taking the time to send me the note letting me know.

I don't know if you know much of Barbara's friendship and collaboration with me that dates back to 1974, but I hope you don't mind my sharing with you some of my recollections and fond memories of the times I had with Barbara.

I met Barbara through a colleague of mine on the faculty at University Without Walls-Berkeley, Victor Acosta. As I'm sure you know, Barbara and Victor were domestic partners for a number of years. Soon after we met, Barbara, Victor, myself and another colleague, Joanne Kowalski, did the audacious kind of thing people can sometimes do, especially in young adulthood, and we started a tiny, non-traditional university. It was initially (in 1975) named the Western Regional Learning Center, but it became known in 1980 as the Western Institute for Social Research ("WISeR"). When the four of us were working to launch this unusual but very worthwhile educational institution, devoted to multiculturalism, community improvement and personalized adult learning, we would typically spend hours and hours each week in dialogue, close collaboration and hard work together. Some weeks I would be working side by side with Barbara for as much as 50 hours, and other weeks "only" 10 hours or so. It was not always easy for all four of us working together as a team, but we did so, quite admirably, I think. I should add that I always found it easy for to work with Barbara. Barbara referred to me as "the baby" of the group because I was about 5 years or so younger than the rest. She was always a warm-hearted, good-natured, stabilizing influence on the rest of us. She would tease me about all the hamburgers and cokes I consumed. Although Barbara perhaps was initially involved significantly because of her relationship with Victor, her commitment to WISR went beyond that. Her commitment to solid, high quality adult education was deep, and her devotion to our cause was invaluable. We could not have succeeded, even on the modest scale that the institution has operated for all these years without her dedication, ethical commitment, and hard working and intelligent engagement with our effort.

After about seven or eight years, in the early 80s, Barbara, Victor and Joanne moved on to other pursuits, on good terms with one another and with me, and I remained at WISR, but I stayed in touch over the years, only with Barbara. In the course of working on establishing WISR, she also became good friends with my mother, and would over the years (up until my mother's death at age 90 about 11 years ago), visit my mother, take her out to lunch and in many ways enjoyed keeping her spirits up. Indeed, my mother and Barbara became good friends. I didn't get to see Barbara very much that last 20 years or so, but we always stayed in touch. I always felt a deep connection of friendship, respect and fondness with Barbara. It always mattered to me to know that I could write to her on my Holiday Card and also receive a note back from her. Last year, she commented that she enjoyed receiving our card each year, and seeing (from our family

photo) how we all were changing. She added that I was now looking more and more like the college professor and less like the basketball player she knew. (Her observation was correct.)

I can imagine the sense of loss you and your mother must feel, for although I have only seen Barbara occasionally in the past 25 years, I feel a great sense of loss. She has been an important part of my life ever since 1974, and it has always been important for me to be in touch with her. Words cannot even begin to describe her many wonderful qualities and her very loving and giving nature, but I still felt compelled to write you this note to honor her and to honor my memories and experiences of her, and to let you know that how important she was to me.

Sincerely,

John Bilorusky