



Philip E. Stearns

June 13, 1945 - September 2, 2007

Philip E. Stearns, 62, of West Hartford, died Sunday, September 2, 2007. Cherished retired teacher of English at Manchester High for 35 years, he retained his zest for life until the last moment. In addition to longtime partner Stephen L. Purdy, he leaves broken-hearted numerous close friends, colleagues and legions of former students in whose lives he continued to participate. Also surviving, his dear cousin Carol Lehman of Louisville, Kentucky. Phil was predeceased by his parents, Eleanor Bell Stearns and Clarence E. Stearns, whose joy and engaging minds could only have created our Phil. Full of life and words from the start, his boyhood in upstate New York included writing a "Teen Scene" column for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, participation in the high school debate team, and attendance at area college programs. At 16, he drew on an American Field Service scholarship to spend a summer with a native family on the Greek Island of Crete. As an undergraduate at Colby College in Maine, his passion for learning involved continued debate and study during his junior year at Exeter and Cambridge Universities in England. In the spirit Phil had always worked to help finance his education, graduate study at The University of Wisconsin Madison included six months of teaching in a secondary school - predictably, he chose inner-city Beloit. Indeed, while subsequently tapped for professorship by prestigious universities, he answered his calling to public secondary education in the diverse and evolving community of Manchester. In jumping in full-steam, he tapped literature and theater, community and politics,

to help each of his students find an inner spark and self-esteem. He is most remembered for his stewardship of students to The Hartford Stage "the big city" and a decades-long leadership of the school's Junior Honors English Independent Study Project. With an unlimited scope for the latter, its key criteria remained honest research and respect for others' points of view. Subjects ranged from the likes of Long Wharf Theater to a Broadway choreographer to Holocaust survivors, and the program helped many young people proceed to esteemed higher education, honors, and to strongly successful personal and professional lives. Phil's other mentoring at Manchester High included presence on the school's chapter of AFS, and repeated guidance to students during summer trips to Europe. His unwavering commitment to legitimate ideas and social justice often translated into support for colleagues "up against the system." Those who knew Phil and Stephen saw their art- and music-filled home as a refuge for conversation and solitude, books and food "and cats. We would like to thank the many hearts and hands of Vitas Hospice of East Hartford, and suggest that any memorial contributions be sent either to them, the Helen and Harry Gray Cancer Center at Hartford Hospital, or a Democratic candidate of your choice. Burial services are private, with a public memorial service to be announced in a few weeks. Online messages of remembrance and sympathy may be made at www.mollyfuneralhome.com

Tribute Wall

PB

“ Just recently learned of Mr. Stearns passing. I go back to 1971-72, which may have been his first year teaching at MHS. Even as a relatively new teacher, he brought out interest from all of his students. Way too young to pass for such a vibrant guy. "Ponder thereon" indeed.

Paul Backofen

Paul Backofen - May 16, 2019 at 07:22 PM

DR

“ Mr. Stearns "sparked" an idea in my head yesterday. My Junior Honors project at Manchester had earned a "C" and with real work at half length an "A-" in English 102 13 years later. I just learned of his passing today after thinking that a rewrite of my 12 pages done in Spanish and combined with my current rewrite complete might have been an "a" paper for him. "for whom the bell tolls" was like that. I have written one page, Combatting Street Gang Violence, so, thank you, and, Goodbye, Mr. Stearns.



David Michael Roberts - December 30, 2018 at 12:03 PM

DF

“ Phil was my English teacher in 1984; we remained friends but lost contact in 1999. Recently, I decided that I wanted to get back in touch with Phil and googled his name. That's when I found out he had died five years ago. The news broke my heart.

Phil Stearns was one of the finest human beings I ever knew. I simply can't overstate the profound influence this man had on making me the person I am today. That he had to die so young and in such a horrendous manner hurts me very deeply. I only wish I had known in 2007 so I could have seen the man one last time.

Dean Fiora - September 19, 2012 at 10:09 PM

SP

Hello Dean --

As Phil's longtime partner, I am trying to contact as many people as possible who might like to know about a scholarship I am setting up (at the Manchester Scholarship Foundation) in his name. I saw your wonderful comments online, and would like to send you the notice. Please let me know your address. Thank-you very much, and I do hope you are keeping well.

Stephen Purdy (860) 560-9438

Stephen Purdy - December 08, 2013 at 11:37 AM

SP

Hello Dean --

I would like very much to be in touch with you, to find out how you are and to send you the new notice about a scholarship I have just begun in Phil's name.

You were one of many important people to Phil, and I'm sorry that during the awful time around his death I hadn't been able to reach you. It would help me very much if you will send me your address.

Best wishes -- Stephen Purdy (31 Woodland St. #12-H, Hartford, CT 06105 narrativeve@sbcglobal.net

Stephen Purdy - December 15, 2013 at 11:56 AM



“ *My condolences for the loss of this wonderful man. Sixty-two is way too young for him to leave this world. I am one of his many students who appreciated and adored him. I have had a nice career on the stage and continue to work in that venue when I can here in Michigan. Recently Phil has very much been in my mind, and I have written about how his teaching affected my learning. I am going back to school at the ripe old age of 42 to get my degree in elementary education.*

Phil helped me learn to appreciate literature, he helped learn me how to write better and helped me learn how to live well. I was accepted into the summer youth program at The Hartford Stage one summer because of his help.

I shall do my best to remember how he taught and pass that kindness and safe learning environment, among other things, on to my own students. I am so sorry I couldn't have spoken to him one more time.

My heart goes out to Stephen Purdy who I don't know. Stephen, I'm glad Phil had a partner with whom he shared what sounds like a great life. I hadn't been in touch with Phil for quite some time and still this passing hurts my heart. My heart goes out to all who have been close to him these years because I'm sure you will miss him even more than people like I do. You are in my thoughts.##imported-begin##Jennifer Joy##imported-end##

November 14, 2007 at 12:00 AM

SP

Hello Jennifer -- As Phil's longtime partner, I remember him talking often and with pride about you. I am sending out notices of a scholarship that is just being started in his name, and would like to send you one. Meanwhile, I hope you are well. Stephen Purdy (Hartford)

Stephen Purdy - December 08, 2013 at 11:40 AM



“ Phil was one of the greatest teachers i ever known. His personalized instruction taught me so many lessons, i could not possibly recall them all. Trips to NYC to see plays, musicals, concerts; movie nights and explanations of things in this world that are way above and beyond what an English teacher is expected to do. His loss is deeply felt. Let us all rejoice in the light he has brought to our world!##imported-begin##Rob Fallon##imported-end##

September 22, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ I was a student in Phil's Junior Honors English class during the 1985-86 academic year. Phil was one of the most skilled, compassionate and inspiring teachers I have ever known. I am also a teacher and I recognize his enduring influence in my own work. Phil was also remarkably generous. He befriended me and took me and other former students to NYC six or seven times. We visited art museums, Carnegie Hall and the theater. I remember seeing Pygmalion, starring Peter O'Toole. Phil was one of the great human beings of our time. I will deeply miss him.##imported-begin##Allen Livermore##imported-end##

September 21, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ Stephen,
Please accept my deepest condolences on your loss. Take care.##imported-begin##Doug Maine##imported-end##

September 13, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ Sum up Phil in 1000 characters? Phil WAS 1000 characters. As a high school kid in the early 1970s, Phil's sparkling intelligence, zany humor, and incredible passion for the arts drew me to him like a magnet.

Soon I went out of my way to hang out with him, and I drew many other kids into Phil's orbit. He became a hero; we discussed him and his antics constantly. We affectionately teased Phil about being Phil, and he loved it. Phil was my light and star during my time at MHS, no one stands as a remote second.

After graduation we became close friends, Phil took me to England and NYC several times. He'd done everything, so he was only interested in doing whatever I wanted to do. He miraculously got us last second Broadway tickets to *Equus* in NYC the night Richard Burton premiered. We got there late, the play was about to start and why wasn't Phil handing me a ticket? Why was he dawdling? Because he realized the tickets were not together, and he was meticulously scrutinizing them to make sure I'd get the better seat 10th row!.

Every moment with Phil seemed to offer another intellectual revelation, except for the many times of gut-busting laughter; I cannot forget how his face would turn red. He seemed to know something about everything; so much so that I was startled when I presented him with questions he could not address. I can't begin to explain how much I learned from this man about art, film, literature, music, and life in general; for me he was almost like a private tutor. He always took tremendous, caring interest in me and my development as a person and a scholar.

Life, jobs, and marriage took me away from Phil, as well as many others, and I did not see him for many, many years. I kept thinking, "I'll look him up next year, no rush." Now he is gone. I hope someone learns from this sad lesson.

Now I teach and I more or less write for a living--thanks in no small measure to Phil--but words fail me. In our lifetimes, if we are lucky, we will meet just a handful of truly amazing human beings. For me, Phil was one. The loss of Phil is devastating, but I know that he will live in my heart forever, as he will for countless others whose lives he touched, whose lives he shaped. Phil, you were a gift, a blessing, in my life, and your mission is mine.##imported-begin##Jeff Cooper##imported-end##

September 13, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“*Mr. Stearns was my teacher for both English Composition and English Literature in 1975. Thirty-two years later, I still remember many of his assignments and his gift for teaching.*

On the first day of composition class, he asked us to write instructions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The next day, he came to class armed with peanut butter, jelly, a huge loaf of bread and a knife. The class was in hysterics as he followed our instructions "precisely," squashing one sandwich on the floor with his shoe. He also had us write our autobiographies, and I still have a tattered copy, with his many thoughtful and humorous comments in the margins.

He introduced us to literary and film works not part of the usual curriculum -- we read Maugham's "the Razor's Edge," watched Bergman's "the Seventh Seal," thank goodness he was able to explain its meaning to us! and Audrey Hepburn and Albert Finney in "Two for the Road."

His enthusiasm, love of literature and the arts and fondness for his students will always be remembered. I hope you find comfort in knowing of the many lives he has touched. I consider myself very fortunate to have been one of Mr. Stearn's students.##imported-begin##Kaila Pilver Riggott##imported-end##

September 09, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ *To live in hearts we leave behind;
Is not to die
Thomas Campbell, Hallowed Ground*

*My deepest sympathy on your loss, Stephen
I was a student of Mr. Stearns in the mid 70?s, not an easy time for
students and high school teachers. My memory of being in his class
is about his teaching style. He urged us to think for ourselves, be
willing to make changes, develop perspective, read and read
often.##imported-begin##Linda Sanchini##imported-end##*

September 08, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ *I was not fortunate enough to have had Phil for a teacher but as
senior at MHS he was very supportive of a group of us who were
making a movie for a class our senior year. He really made us feel
good when he showed our movie to several of his classes and even
had some questions on one of his exams about our movie. He had
a great way of connecting with students and bringing out the best in
them. When I became a teacher in the Manchester system about 10
years later Phil remembered me and came right up to me at one of
our all system meetings. He will be greatly missed by
many.##imported-begin##Steve Hadge##imported-end##*

September 07, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ I am so very sorry for your loss. He was a wonderful person. I graduated from MHS in 1975 and Mr. Stearns was one of my teachers. I am not certain exactly which year I was in his class but I have always remembered him. He allowed me this may sound corny to be me. He understood the true meaning of education. He inspired and engaged me. He did not always follow the "rules" and I admired him and was thankful for that - it made us all better people. I am fortunate to have had his influence on my life. Be proud of the profound influence he had on so many lives. You are in my thoughts at this sad time.##imported-begin##Rhonda Quaglia McCarty##imported-end##

September 07, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ Please accept my deepest sympathy for your terrible loss, Stephen. I am just one of probably scores of parents who can remember the kindness Mr. Stearns showed my children at MHS. My daughters are eager to recall how much they enjoyed his class and what a compassionate teacher he was. Amanda, now a college graduate, reminded me that he would allow her to rewrite papers in order to help her learn how one should be written. She thinks his patience and kindness were instrumental in helping her make it out of HS and succeed in college. I wish you peace and strength in the difficult days ahead. Our prayers are with you.##imported-begin##Marie DeNies##imported-end##

September 06, 2007 at 12:00 AM



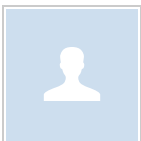
“ My sincerest condolences to Stephen for the loss of your partner, as well as his many friends. Phil was such a great teacher. One of our assignments for junior English was doing our first resumes. I had never really worked so I made up a bunch of stuff like I had done observation in a surgery theatre and I could speak Portugese - I remember the smirk when he handed it back and told me it wasn't a fictional assignment. Then we were given the task of interviewing a grown-up. I cannot remember who I interviewed, but he had us watch videos of the Barbara Walters Oscar Specials for a week in class to bone up on our interview skills. How could I not major in English after that? Take good care - we all better off having known this funny and wise gentleman.##imported-begin##Michael Barry##imported-end##

September 05, 2007 at 12:00 AM



Dear Michael -- I would like to send you a notice of a scholarship being set up in Phil's name, at the Manchester Scholarship Foundation. If you will send me your address, I will send you the card. Best wishes --
Stephen Purdy (31 Woodland St, #12-H, Hartford, CT 06105)

Stephen Purdy - December 08, 2013 at 12:21 PM



“ I taught in the English Department at Manchester High with Phil for over 20 years and was his Department Chairperson for many of those years. I will treasure the memories of working with Phil and the friendship I shared with him. All of us who worked with him learned from him and his commitment to kids.##imported-begin##Dr. Lee Hay##imported-end##

September 05, 2007 at 12:00 AM

SP

Dear Lee --

*As Phil Stearns' longtime partner, I would like to send you a notice of a scholarship being set up in his name at the Manchester Scholarship Foundation. If you will send me your address, I will do so. Best wishes -
- Stephen Purdy (860) 560-9438 (31 Woodland St, #12-H, Hartford, CT 06105)*

Stephen Purdy - December 08, 2013 at 12:17 PM



“ *The first time I met Phil was in the summer when he moved from Madison, Wisconsin to Manchester to take up his teaching position at Manchester High School. I was struck then by the intelligence and energy level he brought to the task, and he never lost that dedication and giving of himself through all his years of teaching.*

I was a fellow teacher and also a Dept. Chair with Phil, and he was a top member of the department. I have many memories of laughter and heated discussions over politics, the time when we picketed the state capital and Camp Hartel when the Bridgeport teachers were imprisoned for striking, the hours of writing curriculum and discussing how many angels could really tap dance on the head of a pin, and especially the nuances of a Broadway play or the Hartford Stage's latest.

Phil advised my son, Christo, on what to do on a trip to London, and motivated me to go there in a later year. His enthusiasm for travel and attention to the rest of the world was catchy, and he often brought people to MHS who were in turbans or other exotic dress to share their experiences with the school.

Phil will be missed, but his impact will continue to resonate through his professional partners who became his friends, and the many students who were touched by his teaching.

So sad for you Stephen, and my family and I share in your sorrow for your loss.##imported-begin##Sherry Jamo##imported-end##

September 05, 2007 at 12:00 AM

SP

Hello Sherry --

As Phil Stearns' longtime partner, I am trying to contact those who might be interested in news of a scholarship being set up in Phil's name at the Manchester Scholarship Foundation. He spoke of you often with high regard, and I met you at a wedding. I hope this reaches you, and that you will send me your address so I can send you the notice card. Best wishes -- Stephen Purdy 860 560-9438

Stephen Purdy - December 08, 2013 at 12:12 PM



“ We are sad and sorry for the passing of our wonderful long time neighbour Phil.##imported-begin##Oscar & Miryam Birman##imported-end##

September 05, 2007 at 12:00 AM



“ I am a former student of Mr. Stearns. He was an amazing man and truly changed my perspective about English. He showed me that English could not only be fun but also intellectually stimulating. No matter what was going on that day, he was always smiling and making jokes during the class. I'll never forgot our first assignment, the "ME" bag. He truly embraced who he was and his personality was contagious. His class was by far one of the most memorable of my high school career. He will be missed and I am so sorry for your loss.##imported-begin##Jennifer Miner##imported-end##

September 05, 2007 at 12:00 AM