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WARRIORS I HAVE KNOWN

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When I began my work as Director of the Conservatory at [Baldwin-Wallace College](#) in the fall of 1967, one of the first persons I met was Consuelo Centers. Mrs. Centers' job description said "receptionist", but I soon learned how inadequate that title was. She was diminutive in her person, but powerful in her presence. She knew everything and everybody when it came to Conservatory affairs. I soon learned that when she suggested that I might pay attention to something or someone, I'd be well advised to take the hint.

At the time I arrived on the scene, Connie was probably around 60. She lived in [Olmsted Falls](#) with her husband, Truman, and her daughter, Dawn, a BW student.

I always felt a special link to Connie since, like me, she was an adopted child. The woman who adopted her was a licensed architect and unmarried. That woman raised, I believe, about a dozen adopted kids. Quite an undertaking, especially for a single woman in the early 1900s.

Neither weather nor illness ever kept Mrs. Centers from showing up for work. So I was surprised one day to get at home an early morning phone call from her, asking to be excused from work that day. By that time I knew her voice well enough to know something serious was amiss, so I asked what was wrong. "Dawn is dead, she said." I said I'd be right out, and Maggie and I immediately drove to her home.

We found a police car in the driveway, and we learned that Dawn had been shot by her former boyfriend, a fellow BW student, a young man who had then turned the gun on himself.

Connie came quickly back to work after the funeral, and we never discussed the matter again. She continued in her role at the Conservatory, and she continued to be the single person most often and most affectionately visited by returning students. In many ways, I always considered her the soul of the Conservatory. I suspect there was no one who knew Connie whose life was not enriched by her.

But back to paying attention to what she said to me. On New Years Day 1976, I was surprised by a heart attack. During the recuperation period, I became very interested in the Sufis. As many of you probably know, Sufis are the mystics of Islam, and have been killed in large numbers over the centuries by their more orthodox Muslim brethren. I was

reading everything I could find about the Sufis, but all I read made it appear that to find an actual, live Sufi was extremely difficult.

I was seated at my desk late one morning when in came Mrs. Centers. She said, “There are a couple of alumni outside that I think you’d like to meet.” I said that would be fine, and in came two young ladies. The conversation was lively, and I found myself telling them about my interest in Sufism. One of them replied, “Well, I can put you in touch with the Sufis if you like.” And she did.

Connie continued in her role at the Conservatory for many years. She eventually died, after her husband, and the manner of her dying was totally congruent with her way of living. One Friday, when she was in her 80s, she left work, went home, and went to sleep. _ She never awakened. She died with her boots on!

Consuelo Centers was a warrior. Of course, she was a warrior. She battled all her life. First, as one of a dozen adopted kids. Second, as a woman in a man’s world. Third, as Dawn’s mother, left behind to mourn after a tragic and premature death. Fourth, as an indomitable, woman--”Never explain; never complain,” could have been her motto—a woman who always made everyone around her feel better about the world because she was in it.

Connie was a tiny woman. I doubt she weighed a hundred pounds. But as a human being, she was a giant, and she was A WARRIOR.

So just who is a warrior? Who qualifies for that title?

As far as I’m concerned, one who chooses to defy adversity rather than surrender to it, who takes what life presents and makes it work, who keeps a stout heart and a strong spirit—any such person fits my idea of a warrior. And I didn’t fully realize until I started this paper just how many of life’s warriors I have been privileged to know. Let me tell you about a few more of them.

First, a couple of Presbyterian ministers whom I’ve known well. (It’ll be especially good for you atheists to hear some good stuff about clerics, don’t you think?)

Lewis Raymond was the pastor of Cleveland ’s Old Stone Church . He hired Maggie and me as music directors back in 1959. He was a former commercial fisherman who never lost either his love of sailing or the toughness it took to follow that line of work. (Sometimes I think you have to be pretty tough to be a minister, too.) Lewis and Peggy had two daughters. The elder, Faith, was born severely brain-damaged, due to a prolonged birth process. The younger, Lois, married and had children, but was assailed by myasthenia gravis in her later life. Lewis and Peggy kept daughter Faith with them throughout their lives, and where they went, she went. They also became active in battling myasthenia gravis through fund raising and public speaking. They too were WARRIORS--hardy, courageous, indomitable.

Bill Hage was the minister of First Presbyterian Church in [Stillwater](#) OK, where Maggie and I shared the music gig in 1955-7, fresh out of grad school and the US Army. They were the parents of three, and both Bill and Margaret were athletically inclined. They particularly enjoyed skiing. Not too long before we first met them, and after their children were born, Margaret contracted polio. At the time we knew her, she was confined to a wheelchair. This did not stop Bill and Margaret from traveling, raising their kids, having people in for dinner [every Sunday](#) after church, or doing all those other things that make for a rich life. They too were WARRIORS. The non-Biblical author whom Bill cited most often in sermons was Kirkegaard; I remember particularly this quotation: “Life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forwards.” That seems to be to be a veritable prescription for warriorhood!

Ed Riemenschneider was a physician in [Akron](#). His father, Albert, had been the founder of the BW Conservatory. Ed and Mary Beth had three children. The first two were boys—Tom, now a physician, and John, now an attorney. Ed and I were linked by a number of things. First, I was born on his 21st birthday, October 4th. 1929. Second, he was the chairman of the BW Trustee committee for the Conservatory, so we worked closely together for a number of years. Third, his father was the first director of the BW Conservatory, and I was the fourth.

I mentioned that Ed and Mary Beth had three children. Their sons are now in law and medicine. The third child was a daughter, Susie, who was born with Down Syndrome. Ed and Mary Beth kept her at home, gave her the best possible schooling, and took her pretty much everywhere they went, including a number of trips to [Europe](#). Ultimately, with help, she wrote and privately published a book on what it was like to grow up with Down Syndrome. I remember that at her Mary Beth’s funeral, while Susie was reading her own personal tribute to her mom, Maggie leaned over to me and whispered, “Susie is Mary Beth’s masterpiece! And she was. Everybody in that family was A WARRIOR, not least Susie.”

When Maggie finished her master’s at the [Eastman School](#) of Music in 1953, she landed a sabbatical replacement post at [Hastings College](#) in [central Nebraska](#). This, by the way, was at a time when colleges routinely sent female applicants letters saying, “We’re looking for a man. Sorry.” And Maggie had had several of those letters, notwithstanding her being valedictorian of her Eastman class. (And yes, I was in it!) Being a warrior herself, Maggie kept on applying. The man who eventually hired her, Hayes Fuhr, was remarkable. He stood probably five feet two and had a rather modest academic background, but he was a giant in his place and time. He had come to a small Midwestern college as a teacher of elocution, then became a voice teacher, and over the years built up his department to where it numbered a dozen full time faculty, enrolled nearly a hundred majors, and was housed in the newly built Fuhr Hall of Fine Arts. It was one of the first all-Steinway schools? Anyhow, when Maggie went there in fall 1953, she was on a one-year sabbatical replacement appointment. Four years later,

summer 1957, she and I were in bed on a Saturday morning in Stillwater OK , engaging in what newly married folk sometimes do on a Saturday morning, when the phone rang. To answer or not to answer, that was the question. And a real question, at that moment!

But calls in those days were not as ubiquitous as they are today. So I picked it up. Hayes Fuhr was on the line, and he was calling to offer us TWO assistant professorships starting that very fall. Wow! Of course, we said yes. No question about it.

So that fall I had my first chance to study Hayes Fuhr. I had not a clue that in four years, at age 70, he would retire and I would be appointed to his post. Believe me, I knew that I was stepping into a very large pair of shoes!

Now I'm sure you all realize that to achieve what Hayes Fuhr did at that time—the late 1950s, and in that place—south-central Nebraska, he had to be a warrior. And he was. He was without doubt one of the most potent personalities I have ever encountered, and a spell-binding speaker to boot. Beyond question, A WARRIOR.

Sometimes one's students can also turn out to be one's teachers. Out in [Nebraska](#), one of our most talented students was Roberta Schmidt, a young lady from [Colorado](#). Her main performing medium was organ; she was also talented in composition. After graduation, she followed the usual path—married and had one child, a son. But after a number of years she determined that her real orientation was homo- rather than hetero-sexual. By that time, she and her husband had already divorced. After a time she found a female partner, a military officer, and they had a number of good years together.

Ultimately we lost Berta to pancreatic cancer in 2009. Not even her closest friends knew she was afflicted until two days before she died. There is no doubt in my mind that Berta too lived her life as A WARRIOR.

(Parenthetically, I should mention that Berta did me a tremendous favor a number of years ago. I was trying to get a copy of my original birth certificate so that I could trace my biological heritage. Berta worked in an adoption agency and was able to help me achieve my goal, for which I was, and am, very grateful.

Another warrior prominent in my life, and Maggie's, was our organ teacher at the Eastman School, Catharine Crozier. She was one of the most brilliant organists of her time, and the only thing for which her playing was ever criticized was being “too perfect.” It was also not uncommon to hear it said, “She plays almost like a man.” (I never was sure whether that was a compliment or a slam!) At any rate, the absence of flaws, mistakes, whatever-- was seen by some as a disqualifier for an artist. (I never could see it that way. Still can't.) Catharine married her teacher at Eastman, Harold Gleason, a man considerably older than she. He was already married, with, I believe, two sons, and the second marriage was not well received by many in the Eastman School community. So life as a new, young faculty member married to “someone else's husband” must not have been easy. Catharine never let it affect her work in any way.

She simply soldiered on. But the thing she taught most indelibly to her students was the idea that only perfection was acceptable, and that it WAS achievable. In her later years, when she had lost Harold to death, and one of her eyes to a medical accident, she continued to perform magnificently. A MUSICAL WARRIOR.

I think now of a pair of warriors in my own family. My aunt Kathryn, a life long cigarette smoker, wound up with cancer in her later years. After having a breast removed, she was told that Medicare would pay for a prosthetic brassiere. Her reply: “Ridiculous waste of taxpayer money,” and she simply stuffed her bra with newspaper. She died a self-made millionaire and a one-of-a-kind rugged individualist—indeed, A WARRIOR.

Her father, my grandfather, William H. Scharf, for whom our son Will is named, was what was called a merchant tailor. His business was to import fabrics and workmen from Europe, and to custom-make suits in his [Jamestown NY](#) shop. The majority of his customers came from [New York](#) and [Pittsburgh](#) to [Chautauqua](#) Institution, and they would visit “Scharf the tailor” each summer to have their suits made for the next season. Grandpa used to walk from home to office and back each day, at least a mile, in all kinds of weather. (Remember, this was western New York, in the snow belt.) In his sixties, he fell and broke one hip. In his seventies, he fell and broke the other. He continued to pretty much walk to and from work, with legs that looked like parentheses. His wife, Genevieve—Jibby to him—continued to keep up their large house, doing the washing in the basement and the drying in the attic. WARRIORS? I’d say so.

My next example of warriorhood breaks my heart. Maggie and I have a former Nebraska student, Larry Cook, who has had in several ways a very tough life. Larry worked as my administrative assistant in [Washington DC](#) after finishing his stint in the US Army. After he and I both left [Washington](#) in 1967 he entered the [University of Iowa](#) to earn his PhD, which he did with great success. Ultimately he joined the faculty of the University of [Edmonton, Alberta](#). He achieved tenure, had a professional chorus in [Edmonton](#) in addition to his university duties, and was well along on a successful career track. He and his wife Jane had four children, two boys and two girls.

At a certain point they decided that they’d prefer to have their children grow up as Americans rather than Canadians. So Larry took a position as head choral conductor at the [University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill](#). When he came up for tenure, it was not granted. (The music school was dominated by musicologists, not performing musicians, and we ultimately learned that no choral conductor had ever been granted tenure there.)) So Larry next found a position at [Northwestern University](#) in [Evanston, IL](#). This time he was moved out when it became desirable to increase the music school’s percentage of non-Caucasian faculty. So Larry found himself eventually having to settle for the post of music director in a smallish [North Carolina](#) Episcopal parish.

I mentioned that Larry and Jane had four children. Their oldest daughter, a very bright girl and a highly rated competitive swimmer, went off to [Oberlin College](#). In her

sophomore year she received the first B grade she had ever gotten. Shortly thereafter she committed suicide. There was no note, and no help of any kind from Oberlin by way of determining what had caused her to take her own life, and so Larry and Jane were left with questions but no answers. I am sorry to have to tell you, by the way, that they never received from Oberlin College a single verbal or written communication expressing regret for their loss.

We recently, and sadly, learned that Larry is now fighting cancer, and the prognosis is not good at this point. But the remarkable thing is that I have yet to hear from Larry what could be called a complaint—about the course of his professional life, about the loss of his daughter, or about his current health condition. To have passed through what he has in his life—and what his wife, Jane, has passed through with him—without complaint, with courage, and with good cheer always—to do that, I am sure, has required that fortitude which marks a warrior, or in the case of Larry and Jane, A PAIR OF WARRIORS.

Reflecting on these warriors I have known has been a moving and revelatory experience for me. As I have been engaged in it, it has dawned on me that I have lived my life surrounded by warriors and inspired by them. Often I have not recognized their warrior qualities until long after the fact. Sometimes the very qualities I now respect and admire seemed almost like blemishes at the time. Sometimes I saw perseverance as stubbornness, Courage as blindness, Calmness in the face of danger as lack of awareness, Silence as want of ideas or understanding, Meekness as cowardice, Flexibility as lack of backbone; And in all cases I was wrong.

But what has been most illuminating to me has been the realization to which I referred a moment ago: that I have been so fortunate as to have been surrounded by warriors all my life—persons of conviction, courage, and integrity. I just pray now that I not fall too far short of the examples they set.

In closing, I'm moved to say a little something about our communal life and where we stand as a nation. What I observe is that equality of opportunity in life is being compromised by a demand for equality of outcome in life. That the concept of self reliance seems to be losing out to the demand for "fairness." And that the ideal of effort to overcome obstacles is giving way to the hunger for ease and security.

It seems to me that as a nation we urgently need to do more to develop and encourage warriorhood in our citizenry. The conduct of our military in the past decade has certainly provided an example for the rest of us, even though there is a clear line of demarcation between the warriors I have cited and the warriors of our armed forces. Make no mistake: I am NOT suggesting that we militarize our society. I AM suggesting, however, that there are military virtues which can use wider circulation among us—

courage under fire (real or metaphorical), determination to achieve the goal, a clear sense of duty, and loyalty to one's comrades in arms. These qualities have characterized every one of the warriors whom I have brought to your attention tonight.

Now, there are warriors in this room tonight. I know who some of them are. I can't, of course, know about everyone. I have chosen not to embarrass anyone by citing him or her, and in a way I regret that. Nevertheless, writing this paper has been a powerful experience for me. I have been powerfully reminded of my great good fortune in having been surrounded by so many warriors throughout my life, and I am even now keenly aware that I have named only a handful of those warriors in this paper.

Finally, my own definition of a warrior:

A WARRIOR TAKES WHATEVER LIFE GIVES AND WORKS WITH IT TO
CREATE A GOOD LIFE FOR HIMSELF AND FOR OTHERS AROUND HIM,
LEAVING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR HIS HAVING BEEN IN IT.

I give the final word to my Sufi teacher, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan: "Self pity is the greatest weakness and the heaviest curse." No self-pity for warriors!