

A Legacy of People

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Photo by Amanda Leung



Marshall Shulman

Ambassador Marshall Shulman was the founding director of Columbia University's Harriman Institute. A decorated veteran of World War II, he served in both the Truman and Carter administrations. He passed away in July 2007. The following is taken from Gloria Duffy's comments at his memorial service at Columbia University on September 10, 2007.

A mentor is a type of second parent; a parent in one's profession, as it were. To paraphrase Margaret Mead, another wise and now-departed Columbia professor, mentors ensure cultural transmission from one generation in a profession to the next – of knowledge and values, of goals and standards of behavior.

I was lucky to have Marshall as the most important early mentor in my work. He was a mentor who never had to be asked for help. Instead, an invisible hand seemed to be working behind the scenes on one's behalf. Marshall had a deep interest in helping others and an intuitive sense of what assistance was needed. He listened, observed, and then just the right resource would mysteriously appear.

Marshall left those of us he mentored with such important lessons, both for our professional work and for life in general.

He offered us knowledge and impelled us to put that knowledge to work for public service. For Marshall, it was not sufficient just to understand our field. He communicated the importance of doing something – through teaching, research, government work, track-two diplomacy – to address the dramatically dangerous problems, such as the U.S.-Soviet standoff and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, that confronted our society.

Marshall taught the importance of balance in dealing with the Soviet Union and, later, Russia. At the State Department during both the Truman and Carter years, Marshall cautioned that the U.S. should not lose perspective on our most important goals – such as minimizing the danger of nuclear war – by overreacting to the minor incidents in our relations with the USSR. This insight about balance and perspective is well to keep in mind today as we contemplate a wealthier and more assertive Russia.

Marshall was a strong yet gentle person. He treated everyone with respect. He taught by example that one can be an effective leader while maintaining civility.

I once asked Marshall what he considered to be the most

important factor in his own development. He said it was the unquestioning love and support of his mother, which created a sense of security that supported and nourished him throughout his life. He passed on that love and support to his students and colleagues.

Those who knew what a wonderful store of knowledge and history was inside Marshall's mind sometimes regret that he did not set it down in more books and articles. That is because in partnership with his wife Colette, Marshall invested his time in people. I remember the first time I rode up to Sherman for the weekend with the two of them, with their cat "dorogaya" clinging to the top of the front seat of their green Dodge sedan and the conversation roaming across politics and foreign policy. To me, this was utterly charming; I bathed in the knowledge and warmth both Marshall and Colette shared so generously. Time and again, Marshall lingered in conversation with his students and other guests in Sherman, while a manuscript awaited his attention up the hill in his study.

But through the extraordinary amount of time and attention he gave to people, Marshall multiplied his impact. The books we have written, the government work we have done, the younger people and general public we have educated, the NGOs we've supported – all of this is an extension of Marshall's work.

A couple of weeks ago, at the 80th birthday party of yet another wise elder, Bill Perry, I expressed my sadness at Marshall's passing, and about the aging and death of other older mentors and friends. My friend Larry K. Smith, sitting beside me, quoted to me from Linda Pastan's poem "The Last Uncle":

*The last uncle is pushing off
In his funeral skiff (the usual black limo)
Having locked the doors behind him on a whole generation
And look, we are the elders now
With our torn scraps
Of history, alone
On the mapless shore
Of this raw, new century*

Then Larry put his finger to my forehead and said, "You're it," meaning, It is our generation's turn to be the elders.

Luckily that time has not yet fully arrived, as some of our wise elders are still with us. But when the time does come, our shore will not be "mapless." Marshall's wise and thorough mentorship has laid down a joyful and judicious path for us to follow. Ω