

“ Ed J. “

by Glenn L. Zayon

Teaching in the Detroit Public School System “ off the wall “ administrative impositions coupled with a grossly over crowded fourth grade classroom, and a despot yet lame duck principal had me searching for another teaching position during the summer of 1989.

In late July a phone call from “ The Friends School in Detroit “ (the only Quaker school in or around the city) prompted me to place my Pontiac keys in its ignition and motor from my Southfield apartment to Indian Village, suburban appearing neighborhood one mile east of downtown Detroit.

As I entered the rectangular two story school building, walking briskly toward me across a green carpeted lobby was a rather tall lanky man. He warmly welcomed me, identified himself as the school’s headmaster having one year as leader under his belt, and lead the way back across the large square lobby to his office.

A glass coffee table was our symbolic common ground as we diagonally sat across from one another. His office exuberated wholesome coziness and warmth. At first the interview followed the traditional format focusing on my background and educational perspectives. It was not long after we started that somehow our professional conversation expanded into a two hour affable give and take full of ideas, laughter, insights, and joys blanketing a host of topics.

As we arose and stood facing one other, this open minded pursuer of humanity, reason, and truth, Edward Jacomo, this dynamic yet gentle headmaster and gentleman, politely ignored my gesture to effect a sincere handshake and instead hugged me as if we were reuniting brothers meeting after years of separation.

For a second or two I felt immediately awkward though I returned his embrace. Then I thought how fittingly appropriate and courageous of him to demonstrate the strength of his warmth. Our conversation had been warm and embracing so why not place a human explanation point on the mutual sense of sincerity and understanding that had grown and connected us.

Kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, and so on through eighth grade (the school was K – 8), teachers continually sought out Ed for solutions.

‘My class needs to set up a tent in the lobby.’

‘Our class wants to start a vegetable garden ‘

‘My children need math manipulative rods’

My little ones want a special parents’ night ‘

‘ How can we arrange a week long class trip to Philadelphia ‘

On and on the ideas and requests flourished. Ed wanted each one directed to him, not as a matter of control, but as a means of exploring possibilities so that each reasonable request could be honored.

In this multicultural setting Ed made certain everyone was regarded an important respected individual. There was an enthusiastic sense of belonging, of community, an energy of purpose, and spirited dedication embraced by students, parents, and educators. In a significant way all of this was due to Ed’s educational leadership style and certainly Ed’s humanity.

In the two years that I taught in this school (paying teachers was not their strong suit) I observed Ed use his insightful creativity and resourceful intelligence to find or construct pathways to success. Time and time again his meaningfully encouraging words were “ We shall – we will – find a way to do this “.

At the age of 52, in 1992, Ed Jacomo died... cancer

I think all educators should take in their hearts, in their minds, in their humanity, Ed’s viable philosophy and enthusiastic perspective: “ We shall – we will – find a way to do this. “

I remember well that “interview hug “ of 1989, it is still growing within me.