

Eulogy for Loren Pope

Pope-Leighy House

May 17, 2009

Today we celebrate the life of Loren Pope. Most of us who are gathered here today came to know Loren in the later years of his life as a writer, speaker, and advisor to students and their parents. In those roles, Loren became the nation's most articulate and persuasive advocate of the benefit of a liberal arts education, experienced in the context of a residential campus with faculties whose first love is teaching, and who find their calling fulfilled in interactions with students. His books, *Looking Beyond the Ivy League*, *Finding the College That's Right for You* and *Colleges that Change Lives*, offered a new perspective on the college selection process, liberating students and families from the high pressure, high stakes game that, in Loren's opinion, often led to poor choices, and even more often to disappointing results. He examined colleges with the same personal attention that he valued for his clients as he recommended colleges to them.

Loren relished his work with students and the good work of the colleges he most appreciated. He was passionate about our institutions, and he loved hearing new reports on the accomplishments of our students. At the same time, Loren could be equally strong in his comments about some of the most prestigious universities in the country, when he thought they failed to deliver an undergraduate experience of the sort he thought students deserve. It was Loren Pope who introduced to my lexicon the term, "jip joint."

Loren was a man of many interests whose life experience was deep and wide. At the age of 29, he solicited the assistance of Frank Lloyd Wright in the design of a house that he and his family would make their home. He was an avid connoisseur of fine cuisine and excellent wine, not to mention his fondness for a good martini – dry, with olives. Travelling with Loren was a joy in many ways, but one of the special joys was the knowledge that he would have planned ahead, identifying the finest restaurant in which to gather for a meal following the college fair.

Loren was an excellent chef. I had the privilege of joining my president at the time, Ann Die, for dinner with Loren and Viola in their home in Alexandria. Loren was quite particular about boundaries in the kitchen. Dinner that evening was fabulous, exceeded only by the engaging conversation about issues ranging from higher education to social history to sheep farming, one of the many vocations which occupied a portion of Loren's life.

Loren took seriously and lived the wisdom of Socrates that the unexamined life is a life not worth living. I have known few people more intellectually engaged or more energized with the full vitality of life. Together, his intellectual curiosity and his dynamic energy led him to pose questions others had not posed, and to challenge assumptions that seemed firmly entrenched in the canon. When we travelled together, most of us in the group were less than half his age; some were less than a third his age. We ran to keep up with him in airports and in dinner conversations.

Loren was a remarkable man who had a tremendous impact on the enterprise to which we have devoted our lives. He understood that the calling of our colleges is not to prepare our students with techniques for their first jobs, but to equip them with capacities, interests and values that prepare individuals to be creative leaders in all sectors, and to serve the common good. He understood that a good life is of greater value than a perfect score, that curiosity is of greater value than pedigree, that education is far more than the acquisition of knowledge, and that teaching is more than the delivery of a lecture.

Loren believed deeply that when we live these values and order our work by them, the ancient hope for human flourishing will be fulfilled in the lives of the students who become our graduates, and in the society that will be made better by their goodness. We were fortunate to know him, and all of us will benefit from his life for the remainder of our lives. While he wrote of the way our colleges change the lives of students, tonight we recall the way in which our lives were changed by Loren Pope. With gratitude and the pleasure of fond memories, let us share this time of celebration together.