

Tribute to Russell “Russ” Getson, Ph.D. (1919-1987)

Russ was a great friend and mentor, and died far too soon of cancer (age 68).

I met Russ in 1963 while we were both working at the Division of Guidance and Testing , a Division of the State of Ohio Department of Education. We were Assistant State Supervisors and traveled around the state in support of Guidance Counselors, new positions in most schools. We often travelled together and spent many hours singing our favorite songs to pass time on the long drives all over Ohio. We also shared an office and became close friends. Russ got his Ph.D. in 1965, the year before me, and accepted a position at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Several days after I received my Ph.D., Russ called and asked if I would like to interview for a professorial position at Kent State. Things were different in 1966 as evidenced by him suggesting that I bring my resume and come to Kent the following Monday for interviews and lunch. No screening committees or national advertisements...just bring your resume and be interviewed. The following Monday, I drove to Kent for the interviews. I met with Larry Litwack, the Department Chair, then had lunch with most of the twenty-six member department. Dr. Litwack said they would discuss my appointment and give me an answer soon, as the person I would be replacing was retiring and leaving for an extended Fulbright assignment. The next morning, Dr. Litwack called and offered me the Assistant Professor position in the Graduate Department, instructing Masters Degree students. We put our house up for sale (sale by owner), sold it to our next door neighbor, bought a house in Kent, moved and started teaching two weeks later. Things we different in 1966!

My office was next door to Russ' and our friendship became even stronger. We discussed university life, classes, students and

he became a role model for me as we worked together to make our program better and better. We worked together until he retired in 1978 and moved to Florida with his wife, Marge. We corresponded several times each month until his untimely death. Russ was adamant that his move to Florida was a mistake and that one should never leave the support system that had been most helpful in their lives...or at least keep homes in two places.

In the Spring of 1987, I received a call from Marge, The the hospital had just called and said that Russ would be coming home. Russ had been so sick that doctors had been telling Marge that he only had several days to live. Now, that he was going to be coming home was a shock to Marge and she was unprepared to care for Russ, as her health was an issue too. She asked if I would come to Florida and help with Russ. I said I would discuss it with Ruth and call her that evening. Ruth and I decided that Ruth, rather than me, should go to be with Russ and Marge as she was an experienced hospice nurse and could provide more assistance. Marge liked the idea and the next morning Ruth flew to Florida. Ruth told Marge that she could stay for one week, and would try to get home assistance for Russ before she returned to Ohio. Ruth discussed end of life issues with Russ and interviewed caretakers, selecting one for the coming week. Russ kept telling Ruth that her efforts would not be necessary as he would be dying before she returned to Ohio. Russ, as always, kept his word and died the day before she was to depart.

To say that Russ was a man of his word would be an understatement. I never knew him to do one dishonest thing or take advantage of any person or situation. Parts of him have stayed with me, as is the case when one is lucky enough to have such a fine mentor. Some weeks later, I gave his eulogy, and had trouble finishing lots of my sentences because his life and his loss had such an impact on me. I apologized to Marge for my

tears after the service and she said, “It just showed how much you loved him.” And, I did.

November 2018 (While rereading one of the Tributes I had written for a friend, I discovered that I had never written one about Russ, who died thirty-one years ago. A week does not go by that I don't think of him.)