

Larry Fink: Memorial Minute
Rosetta Cohen, 1/27/10

Larry Fink arrived at Smith College in 1963, and he retired as a full time faculty member in 1990. In the 27 years in which he was a professor of Education at the College, Larry had an extraordinary impact on both people and programs here.

Larry received his BA from Stanford in 1951, and his MA and EdD from Columbia in 1963. He began as a high school history teacher in New Rochelle, New York, a job that he claimed was the defining position of his career. He was, he always said, first and foremost a teacher; and his colleagues in Education and Child Study will always remember him as a devoted colleague whose high standards for himself and for his students helped shape the intellectual reputation of our Department.

Larry was expert on everything having to do with education and teaching: from budgets to curriculum, teacher training, educational history and philosophy. But beyond his own field and department, Larry made other extraordinary contributions to Smith. A standout baseball star at Stanford, he was appointed by Jill Conway in 1981 to serve as Smith's first Athletic Director, a position he loved and one at which he truly excelled. Larry's leadership of Smith athletics permanently changed our relationship to college sports: He oversaw the 7 million dollar construction of Smith's athletic center and playing fields. He negotiated our entry into the NCAA's Division III, and he got Senda Berenson, the Smith pioneer of women's basketball, into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

For years after he retired, Larry continued to work tirelessly and effectively on behalf of the schools. In 1992 he was elected to the Northampton school committee and became, in 1994, its chairman. He served as chair of the Bridge Street Building Committee where he planned and oversaw the 6 million dollar renovation of that school. Next, Larry took on the complicated renovation of the high school, serving as steward for the massive rebuilding that took place there in 2000.

There are many other contributions Larry made to our Department, the College, and to the community: He started the Smith-Northampton Summer School, for example, and for many years served as its director, as well as the director of the Smith Campus School. He initiated the program allowing local high school students to take courses at the College; he was director of the Hampshire United Way; he sat on the boards of local banks. Everything he did, he did with passion and competence. When Larry made a decision about something, you could always count on its being incredibly informed, researched and precise.

In a way that few of us do anymore, Larry built his whole life around the College. Living in a college property on Maynard Road, he rarely ventured beyond the Smith community. A creature of strict habit, he arrived every single morning at 8am to read the New York Times in the Morgan Hall lounge. Every day at noon he took his lunch (salad, daily hot entrée and dessert) at the Smith Faculty Club, always sitting at the same table with the same rotating group of his pals. Both of Larry's daughters graduated from Smith. His

wife Barbara, a revered local high school teacher, taught courses for decades in our education department. In the old days, when the College Club was open evenings and on weekends, Larry and Barbara met their Smith friends for regular weekly dinners there. They were a tight, supportive group, intimately involved in one another's lives.

Prickly, opinionated, and deeply conservative in his politics, Larry was a formidable opponent in debate. But he was also one of the most loving and loyal people I've ever known. He would make a policy decision that someone was good or smart, and then nothing they did or said could change that core belief—even if you made the egregious mistake of admiring the Clintons or preferring the Yankees over his beloved Red Sox.

At some point, early on in his career, Larry made a policy decision about Smith College. He decided it was the best college in America and that he would devote his life to the cause. He's left an indelible mark on this institution, and he will be greatly missed.

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