

Along Came Dr. Long - - Written by Gary Sherman (Rant #3)

“Snap out of it!” — Cher as Loretta Castorini in Moonstruck

I bumped into Professor Clifford Long’s number theory class in 1961 at the beginning of my junior year at BG because I needed a math course which satisfied the constraint that it was early enough in the day to spit me out in time for football practice. Keeping my coaches happy enough to see that my educational expenses (tuition and fees, books, room and board) continued to be paid was more important than my less than dogged pursuit of a degree in math because, at the time, my mission in life was to become a professional football player. My expectations for the course were low, but I was sure I would get an A given my record of being able to do math-calisthenics with the best while keeping my questions to myself. To my surprise the course wasn't about math-calisthenics, it was an intellectual scrimmage; open, free-wheeling, questions, conjectures, confusion, examples, counterexamples, and every now and then a theorem and its proof. The halcyon days of Plane Geometry and Miss Koehline were back and I was agog, yet my Dunfee-inspired reticence remained intact, reducing me to a spectator rather than a player—until the Monday after Thanksgiving break.

On that Monday Professor Long stopped me after class and asked if I would meet him in the University Union at three that afternoon for a chat. Dr. Long, then a recently minted PhD out of the University of Illinois, was a football fan taken by the fact, as some of my other professors were, that I was an atypical jock, which is to say that I was majoring in mathematics and minoring in chemistry as opposed to a diet of physical education and coaching courses. Even some members of an ever present cloud of undergraduate jock-sniffers took note, if unbelievably, of my limp academic credentials from time to time: “Are you really majoring in math?” So it wasn’t unusual for me to be chatted-up about football on the way to or from classes—but meeting in the Union with a faculty member struck me as a different kettle of fish.

Yet, meet we did. I couldn’t play the practice-card excuse: our season ended on Thanksgiving day with a 36 to 6 drubbing at the hands of the underdog Fresno State Bulldogs in the Mercy Bowl, a game played in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. So, I went to the Union, puzzled, but expecting to explain the loss to Professor Long. Losses were few and far between during my four years at BG and when one occurred our rabid fans and the press expected an answer to the canonical “Hey, what happened to you guys?” question. By the time we returned to BG on the Saturday after the bowl game our team-think consensus was that we were just a bunch of naive, aw-shucks, young hicks from the Midwest who were overwhelmed by the glitter of La La Land and the well-intentioned agenda the Bowl Committee and Doyt Perry (our NCAA Football Hall of Fame coach and noted eccentric) had set for us.

It all began on Friday, November 17, 1961 with a morning bus trip to Detroit for a flight to St. Louis followed by a bus trip to Carbondale, Illinois for a Saturday game with the University of Southern Illinois Salukis. In retrospect, we may have been dealt an early omen—the Detroit flight was delayed by several hours due to “equipment issues.” As the seemingly infinite sequence of delay updates went on and on, rather like those pesky natural numbers, the more irreverent among us took to nervous, macabre humor to relieve our building tension: the Mercy Bowl was to be played as a benefit game in memory of the 22 people who died when the plane carrying the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo football team crashed on takeoff from the Toledo, Ohio airport the evening of Saturday October 29, 1960. Seventeen of the 22 who died were Cal Poly players, young men whom many of my Mercy Bowl bound teammates and I competed against earlier that very afternoon in Bowling Green. Wouldn’t it be ironic? The short term upshot of the flight delay was that our late arrival in Carbondale precluded our usual Friday pregame practice routine; doubtless more troubling to our coaches than to their naive team. Didn’t our 20-0 victory the next day confirm our invincibility and serve as a precursor to a

thrashing of the Fresno State Bulldogs? Next on the agenda was a bussing to the St. Louis airport where we spent Saturday night in a Holiday Inn in anticipation of a 11:15 am departure for Los Angeles. Forewarned by the Detroit delay I bought a copy of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the St. Louis airport and was able to get halfway through the book between the time we boarded the plane and the time we took off for LAX. Given our delayed departure, the "big reception when we landed at LAX" (according to a postcard I sent to Mom and Dad) and a tourism-inspired version of what should have been a short bus trip from LAX to Beverly Hills—who knows why we went to Muscle Beach?—it was late evening before we began the registration process at the Beverly Wilshire. I don't know if it was fortuitous or by design of the Bowl Committee, but having our crew of Midwestern buzzcuts come face to face with local culture during the extended room registration process in the form of a convention of Southern California hairdressers was a cross-cultural experience enjoyed by all, if for different reasons. Monday morning: a good nights sleep, so now we can get down to the business of the bowl game. Here is what "business" turned out to be: two, short, half-hearted practices at Los Angeles City College and a familiarization visit to the Coliseum because, as became immediately clear upon walking the playing field, seeing the Coliseum on televised football games and being reduced to specks in its vastness were two different things. Now for the meat of our Monday through Wednesday itinerary:

- The team was treated to an extensive, exclusive tour of MGM Studios to include: watching the filming of a *Rawhide* episode featuring a very young Clint Eastwood; climbing the rigging of a mock-up of the *Bounty* used in the filming of the Marlon Brando version of *Mutiny on the Bounty*—I entertained a fleeting fantasy of chucking the football thing and shooting for Hollywood fame; our tour bus being given the finger by Stephen Boyd, Charlton Heston's costar in the movie *Ben Hur*, in response to Joe Nussbaum, one of our halfbacks and a future MD, hollering "Hey Boyd, *Ben Hur* really kicked your ass didn't he!" at him from the bus. Sophistication was us.
- The team attended, and was introduced on, a national broadcast of the Red Skelton show; my Dad's favorite TV show. (Skelton's Clem Kadiddlehopper character often brought him to tears of laughter.)
- A subset of the team, including me and my teammate Bob Crofcheck, and a couple of coaches as chaperones (because, I guess, liquor was served) were treated to a night out at the Crazy Horse on the Sunset Strip. The place was crawling with celebrities, or so the dancing bimbos, dressed in Playboy Bunnylike outfits claimed. I can vouch for the presence of Milton Berle —aka "Uncle Miltie" and "Mr. Television"—at a table near mine, who sans makeup and only 53 years old at the time, looked to me like death warmed over and a drunken Johnny Weismuller, who during the time he graced my table propositioned one of the harder looking bimbos, promising an Olympic gold medal and Tarzan memorabilia as compensation for services rendered.
- On a more wholesome note we were treated, by MGM, to a private viewing of what our hostess claimed was a pre-release version of *The Mating Game* starring Debbie Reynolds and Tony Randall "authorized" especially for us! Google provides a release date of April 29, 1959—who knew you couldn't trust a Hollywood public relations flack.
- An inordinate amount of time was devoted to walking the Sunset Strip and hanging around the Coconut Grove in the old Ambassador Hotel trolling for movie stars. My only seminotable experience: I inadvertently, and literally, bumped into a blonde whom I recognized to be Jan Sterling, a movie star of the 1940s and 1950s who was in descent. As I begged her pardon she, in what seemed a conditioned reflex, kissed me on the cheek and went on her way.
- And there were various curfew violations. The *crème de la crème* involved my roommate Bob Blue, a WigWam High School All-American guard out of Wellston, Ohio and a teller of tales, in the spirit of Andy Griffith. The night before the game I was asleep; after violating curfew myself to run to a grill across the street from the hotel to get a hamburger and a milkshake. Then came Blue — bursting into our room, shoes off, pant legs rolled-up and caked in sand, he launched into a tale woven from contradictory threads of female department store clerks of the Mormon persuasion, alcohol (which Blue would never touch), possible conversion to Mormonism, a beach and roaring

surf. Tall tale or not? During our earlier than usual pregame meal (kickoff was at a then unheard of eleven am) it was whispered that one of our starting ends was hung over.

As for the game, I don't remember a bit of it. And given the way I must have played the Falcons probably would have been better off if I hadn't played. But I did, and the following photograph of our vaunted power sweep turning into a Keystone Cops routine in front of the assembled masses at the Coliseum proves it.



There I am, number 66, a future draftee of both the National Football League's Cleveland Browns (when the Browns were the Browns and a force in the NFL) and the then American Football League's Boston Patriots doing my best to, well, not do too much I guess. In the same vein, our left halfback, Roger Reynolds (31), appears to be running to our bench with the game ball instead of to the goal line; our right halfback, Don Lisbon (36), appears to be appealing to prayer rather than actually blocking a defender; our quarterback Jim Potts (15), is doing what quarterbacks are genetically disposed to do, avoiding contact of any sort. Two years later Roger was playing wide-receiver for the New York Giants, Don was a running back for the San Francisco 49ers and Bob Reynolds (aka The Big Bopper), our left tackle—not visible in this photo—was beginning an eleven year career in the NFL to include three Pro Bowl appearances. In short, the heavily-favored Falcons outmanned the Bulldogs, but the Bulldogs outplayed the Falcons. Our Keystone Cops power sweep explains our total of six points. The aforementioned Bob Crofcheck, who spent eons coaching football, to include winning the Oregon High School Football Coach of the Year award in 1984, attributes the Bulldogs' 36 points to Doyt Perry's coaching genes: he, like his mentor Woody Hayes, was wedded to a static threedep zone pass defense which wasn't pliable enough to respond to a newly evolving passing offense—split ends, wide flanking backs and a rollout quarterback—which Fresno unleashed on us in the second half of the game. My postgame response was a temper tantrum punctuated with slams of my helmet against the wall of the tunnel to our locker room. That evening, mellowed out after basking in an array of hot tubs provided in our Coliseum locker room, we shared a surprisingly enjoyable Thanksgiving banquet with our vanquishers. All involved received a small memorial trophy. Mine was lost years ago—to my everlasting regret—but a bronze plaque, with a haunting image of a fallen airplane as a backdrop to a football team lined up to run a play still stands beneath the center arch of the peristyle end of the Coliseum and engenders in me, and I like to think my teammates and our opponents, a sense of pride that we played to benefit those in need rather than to fill the coffers of the greedy NCAA and their crowd of accomplices. The Mercy Bowl raised \$278,000 (about 2.2 million 2017 dollars) to benefit the families of those who died or were injured in the crash.

The remainder of the trip was refreshingly banal; Friday we roamed Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm; Saturday was a long, delay-free travel day back to BG; Sunday, the Laundromat.

Then came Monday: I got to the Union early—there was no way I was going to keep a professor waiting. But, just a bit early: I wanted to minimize the amount of time I would be a sitting duck for the "Hey, what happened to you guys?" crowd. In the event, no duck hunters showed and Dr. Long showed early, catching me

unaware with a “Hi Gary.” as I was rehearsing a synopsis of the Mercy Bowl saga that I just related to you. Then, after just a couple of minutes of chit-chat about the game and the trip, he came clean. As I remember, it went something like this: “Gary, what we really need to talk about is your performance in my class.” I imagine my eyes widened and my jaw went slack as I thought to myself, he must be kidding, my homework and exams were nearly perfect and I hadn’t opened my mouth. Luckily, before I could mumble something to that effect, he saved me from embarrassing myself by saying “Your homework and exams are exceptional. I think you have real mathematical talent which you are wasting, but who knows for sure—you have yet to say a word in my class. You are shortchanging yourself and your classmates by not participating actively in the give and take of our classroom discussions. Early on in the semester I thought it might be me, but I talked to other mathematics faculty who have had you in classes as a freshman and sophomore and they have had the same experience with you. Why is that? You are certainly not innately shy, I’ve seen you interact comfortably in animated conversations with other students outside of class and you are no shrinking violet on the football field; your coaches tell me in no uncertain terms that the Gary Sherman I am experiencing is not the aggressive leader who plays football for them.” In summary, snap out of it! So there: I was taken to task for not asking questions of a mathematical authority instead of being taken to task for asking questions that challenge a dogmatic presentation of math. If that wasn’t shocking enough, Dr. Long asked me, straight out, what brought me to the state of mathematical affairs he had just told me to snap out of. I hemmed and hawed; he persisted. I hemmed or hawed; he persisted, until finally I came clean with a condensed version of the Mr. Dunfee/Big Jim incident and my apparent subliminal vow to accept math dogma and to deep-six the questioning of gurus. He was clearly taken aback; not so much, I think, by the immaturity of a sixteen year old kid, but by the mathematical environment my classmates and I were subjected to at Bellaire High School—exclusive of Miss Koehline. It was nearing five pm—the dining table at the Commons was calling me and I suppose he wanted to get home to his family— when he asked if I would be willing to continue our conversation at three pm on Tuesday in the privacy of his office where he would have access to a blackboard (remember, it was 1961) should I have any mathematical questions of him concerning the tower. I was dumbfounded that a faculty member would take that much interest in me, but gathered my wits to the extent that I got out a “Sure, I’ll be there.” Meet again, we did—spending over two hours discussing his for-amateurs-only version of the set-theoretic basics that provide the mathematical foundation for the number tower while simultaneously forging the pitons for ascending it. It was during that session I realized there was more to the notion of sets than an occasional union and intersection and asked Dr. Long—willingly baring my mathematical naiveté—if set theory was based on axioms in the manner of Plane Geometry. He smiled broadly; in the way I came to know later that a teacher does when he or she has made a connection with the mathematically unwashed. He then said I was onto something and I should look to Paul Halmos’ recently published book entitled *Naive Set Theory* for further enlightenment. I discovered that Halmos’ book wasn’t in the BG library but I did come across the following cryptic review by Elliott Mendelson of Columbia University in *The Journal of Philosophy* (July 21, 1960):

"Those of us who have been so pleasantly introduced to the intricacies of linear algebra and measure theory by Paul Halmos will not be disappointed by his new excursion into the realm of set theory. . . . It is 'naive' only in the sense that it is informal, contains a minimum of special symbols, and has a charming conversational style. . . . It can be read with pleasure by all, and with great profit by those willing to fill in the details of the proofs."

Dr. Long’s endorsement, Mendelson’s cryptic review and the paucity of the our library’s mathematical holdings drove me to the campus bookstore where I found that Halmos’ book was not in stock because it was not required for a course. But, if I coughed up \$3.50 the bookstore would order it for me. I did, the bookstore

did, and there it was: a humane exposition of the set theoretic axioms that serve as the foundation of modern mathematics as practiced by working mathematicians, to include, eventually, me. Indeed, Naive Set Theory is on my desk now in anticipation of Rant 7.

That said, if I ended this Rant on this note I would be damning Cliff with faint praise. Indeed, I am ever grateful for his intervention in my Dunfee-funk and providing me with an exemplary professorial role model. Each of the accolades I received in my career as a teacher and mathematician was accepted with a bow, first to Cliff, and then to three other professors; two you have yet to meet (Herb Hollister and Maria Wonenburger) and one you have heard of—Paul Halmos. I will end this Rant by saying that thanks to Dr. Long (and of course the Sicilian girl) the fall semester of my junior year in college ended on a satisfying mathematical note (and a satisfying amorous note) and prompted me to spend some time rethinking both an axiomatic boil that flared up during Miss Koenline's plane geometry course (Rant 4) and my first grade arithmetical run-in with Miss Feinberg (Rant 5), oblivious to a looming sentence of four years in limbo attributable to a self-inflicted farrago of math, football and mathematics (Rant 6).

Along Came Dr. Long Written by Gary Sherman

The material by Gary above is approved for website publication as you'll see below in this email exchange

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject:Re: Fwd: Your Dad

Date:Mon, 15 Oct 2018 21:29:12 -0500

From:Sandra Gary <>

To:stevelongmemories@gmail.com

CC:Andrew Long <>

Steve,

You are welcome to use any of it as you see fit. Your Dad was a great teacher and a wonderful human being and I am forever grateful to him.

Bests regards.

Gary

On Mon, Oct 15, 2018 at 2:53 PM Steve Long <stevelongmemories@gmail.com> wrote:

Andy, Thanks for sharing - wonderful perspective on Dad, for sure! Love, Steve

Gary, Many thanks for writing such things, reaching out to Andy and then getting this to him. What you've written is a real treasure. Would you mind if we include the applicable pages about him on his Long Memories website? <http://gustinlongs.longmemories.info/clifford-allan-long-details/> Many thanks for considering this! Steve

On 10/14/2018 11:18 PM, Andy Long wrote: ...

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject:Your Dad

Date:Thu, 27 Sep 2018 16:20:34 -0500

From:Sandra Gary <[✉](#)>

To: Andy Long

Hi Andy,

My name is Gary Sherman. We met, maybe a bit over 20 years ago, at the Joint meetings in San Antonio that you attended with your Dad. My recollection is that together the two of you stopped by the poster session some of my NSF-REU students were presenting. I don't expect our meeting sticks in your memory the way it does in mine; that was the last time I saw Cliff before he passed away. Several years ago, while at BG for a reunion our 1959 NCAA championship football team, I was able to catch your Mom at home to express my belated condolences and my respect for, admiration of, and professional indebtedness to your Dad.

Turns out that I now have a couple of grandsons, a high school freshman and a fourth grader, who seem to have some talent for mathematics (and thankfully, soccer rather than football). So, in my dotage I have taken to ranting to them, in writing, about my personal struggle to distinguish **math** (as a pejorative) from mathematics. Early on in the rants, your Dad comes up and I wanted you to know about a specific incident in my young life which he was responsible for that was formative for my career as a teacher and researcher.

I won't bother you with the half-done manuscript---it turns out your Dad comes up early on in the third rant. So, I have attached a pdf of the first three rants. If you choose to read them, a caveat: I was born and bred in the hard scrabble Ohio Valley, so snark and irreverence are inescapable.

Regards,
Gary