



IN MEMORIAM

Dudley Knight
Professor of Drama
UC Irvine
1939 – 2013

With great sadness I am doing my best to come to terms with the sudden and completely unexpected passing of Dudley Knight, one of the kindest, wisest and committed theatre artists I have ever known.

Dudley and I were in graduate school together in the 1960s and I quickly became enchanted by his wonderful erudition, derived in great measure from his Haverford education, I'm sure, and his wonderful wit, derived from God knows where.

Trained as an actor, he became one of the foremost teachers of voice and speech in our country, and only last year came out with the finest book on this subject to have been written in the last 50 years. "Speaking With Skill" is a detailed and comprehensive investigation of the skills needed by actors and other public speakers, but more importantly, it represents a challenge to the dominant methods of speech training which carry forward the prescriptivist and elitist principles of the Victorian elocutionist. Professor Knight brought the insights of sociolinguistics and the rigor of the acoustic and articulatory phonetician, in to the realm of actor training.

But he remained an actor all his life, and if there is one thing that rang out loud and clear every time he appeared onstage it was his scale, his largesse. He was a glorious Falstaff and an absolutely magnificent King Lear - performing each role on two occasions, each to wonderful reviews, completely sold out audiences and standing ovations at every performance. His other roles, and his many directing ventures, were always on an expansive palette, filled with vigor, charm, and exactitude in virtuosity.

Yet I'll remember Dudley mostly for his splendid humor, which was not just represented in his daily (and always subtle) repartee but in his teaching, his collaboration with theatre artists and theatre students, and in every single page in his book, which has lifted even his most exacting analyses of diphthongs and phanxes into joyous realms of the artistic experience.

Dudley wrote me two emails the day before he suffered his heart attack, and we were planning to meet this weekend for a grand reunion. While that was not to be, I am at least happy that since his retirement from UCI, we have visited each other several times in New York and once at his home in Easton, Pennsylvania -- and I have in this past decade had the delightful opportunity of getting to know much better his wonderful wife, Marta, who made his final decades his happiest.

It is customary in eulogies to say that the deceased will never be forgotten, but we need not say that now, because Dudley, quite simply, is unforgettable.

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We know that our dear friend and colleague, Dudley Knight, passed from this life a very happy man. He was walking home from our season launching Company Meeting where he was slated to play his favorite role in his favorite play, King Lear. Throughout the meeting, he was surrounded by friends, colleagues, former and current students, all of whom admired him greatly. He was in a jubilant mood that night - very much looking forward to the rigorous challenge of playing Lear. If we believe that we choose our time and place to pass from this life to the next, then Dudley surely chose his both wisely and carefully. He was missed throughout rehearsals and performances but his energy, support, and love was keenly present. "Carry on," we heard him say in his sonorous voice. "The show must go on." We dedicated our 2013 Swan season to Dudley Knight.

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