

REMEMBRANCES OF CHAIM GROSS:

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I am quite sure that my relationship with Chaim was shorter in duration than that of all the other speakers. Nevertheless, the intensity and meaningfulness of a relationship cannot be measured merely in units of time.

How can I begin? How to capture that fundamental creative force, pulsating till the end, that wonderful admixture of real and surreal, fantasy and reality, what Thomas Mann called in German "burgher" and geist", that unique interaction of a never forgotten Jewish heritage and a world of art that knew no ethnic bounds?

How did our relationship develop: this odd union of the Yale professor/physician and the older artist from the Carpathians almost 40 years his senior? Chaim's life was based on images: perhaps a few images will say it best.

A first image: Laguardia Place, New York. We met through a mutual acquaintance, a strange fellow. Myrna and I visited Chaim and Rene for the first time about 4 years ago. Laguardia Place soon became a regular stop on our trips from New Haven to New York. On that first visit the rapport was instant. We walked through a studio engulfed by sculpture: mothers balancing children, acrobats, cyclists, and prophets invoking an unanswering God. Constant motion in wood, and stone, and bronze. And the rhythm of creating filled the room. Then, to view the Fantasy Drawings: those wild, fantastic, scarry, stimulating drawings transmitted directly from the mind's recesses to the paper. We talked a long time and then we talked again and again.

And in that day we began to forge what Philip Roth would call a "patrimony": but a patrimony without the usual parent-child baggage that often complicates such relationships, a patrimony without DNA or genetic transmission, a creative patrimony.

Another image: Provincetown. The West End, the wonderfully open and hospitable environment of Chaim and Rene's home. Myrna and I spent two weeks there last summer. I decided to start painting again, after a 17 year hiatus. Chaim offered me his studio to paint in; and long dormant forces, suppressed by the pressures of the ivy league academic world, suddenly returned to my eyes and my hands. The environment nurtured; Chaim nurtured. And suddenly the colors were brighter; they reflected off the dunes as if jousting for my favor on textures once seen in only tans and browns. He would walk down the hill to the studio and offer his comments, gently pointing the way. We would go to galleries and he would teach me to look. A walk down the street might produce lines in the sand made with his cane, and a lesson in minimalism. Always a lesson, and an admonition: "be free with your brush". I hear those words again and again.

Another image: Provincetown, 1990. It is the evening of Tisha B'Av, a very sad day in the Jewish year, commemorating several major tragedies. On that event we chant the traditional Echor, the words of Jeremiah. We sit in the darkened room with candle light and Myrna leads the chanting. Chaim follows the Hebrew and remembers Tisha B'Av in Galicia and the chanting of his father and grandfather seated on the floor covered with ashes. He never forgot from where he came.

Another image: again, Provincetown. We returned from an evening out. The evening is clear and the sky filled with stars: not city stars, but those constellations seen only in the sky over Provincetown, Taos, Safed. Chaim looks up at the sky, smiles, and tells me softly "there are lots of angels up there". And the sky jumped with angels, angels descending and ascending Jacob's ladder, angels gesturing as they glided erotically and effortlessly between clouds and over sand dunes. And in that brief moment reality was transcended: Jacob's ladder became mine.

A final image. We return to Provincetown, August, 1991. Chaim is no longer with us and excitement is mixed with palpable sadness. Our first evening, the night is again filled with endless stars; however, in the clear night one star shines brighter than most. Its twinkling is accented and its glow shimmers against the dark blue. If you will, it smiles at us. You see, Chaim is now with his angels.