

REMEMBERING A PROFESSOR, MENTOR, AND FRIEND

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I vividly recall the trepidation and growing sense of anxiety associated with the mandatory interview to be admitted into Professor Richard Gardner's seminar on U.S. defense policy and national security strategy more than twenty-five years ago. There was a queue of students patiently waiting outside of his office for what ultimately would be a very elegantly and subtly executed sequence of interrogations to weed out roughly 80% of the applicants, drawn from across the Columbia University spectrum of advanced degree programs, not just the polished second and third year Law School students. I felt especially anomalous within this talented cohort, straddling a joint degree program between Columbia College and the School of International Affairs, neither of which was close to awarding me with a normal degree. I therefore presumed my chances for admission to the seminar were somewhere on the spectrum between unlikely to preposterous.

Our meeting was cordial, of course. But I sensed Professor Gardner's uncertainty that he should grant me a seat that a more senior student would never benefit from in their final year as a Columbia student. So we found ourselves making polite small talk. "You must know that this is *terribly* difficult for me," he said. "There are just so many wonderfully accomplished students applying." Well, this interview will end shortly, I concluded, probably for good reason. But there was a silence. Finally Professor Gardner asked me who in the international relations faculty at Columbia influenced and inspired me the most. I immediately replied that it was Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security Adviser to President Jimmy Carter. Professor Gardner became immediately animated, leaning forward in his chair. "Zbig?" he asked with unconcealed enthusiasm. "He admitted you to *his* seminar?" I replied that was in fact correct. And then followed a long discussion about their friendship and collaboration, both at

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Columbia and in the Carter administration, where the two men collaborated on some of the most sensitive issues in the Atlantic alliance and the Cold War, including the communist crisis in Italy, where Professor Gardner had served as ambassador, and the introduction of intermediate range nuclear weapons to NATO. Sometime soon after that interview I was informed that I had been admitted to Professor Gardner's seminar after all. He was taking a chance on me that would influence my life in all of the years to come.

Hundreds of students studied international law and foreign economic policy with Professor Gardner over the decades. His doctoral dissertation at Oxford, where he had been a Rhodes Scholar and produced "Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy," remains a seminal work of historical scholarship. But throughout his career, Professor Gardner had remained deeply immersed in current issues of U.S. national security strategy. Consistent with his practice, students in the Gardner seminar did not so much select the issues they wanted to research but were rather assigned topics that reflected his own sense of a shifting hierarchy of important policy questions. It was in this context that I was instructed to master the question of Anti-Satellite Weapons, also known as ASATs. An arcane and peripheral subject at first, I quickly grasped that offensive weapons in space that could destroy a nuclear superpower's eyes in the sky could accelerate escalation and promote miscalculation in a mounting crisis, creating a dangerous first-strike incentive for a blinded adversary. It is an issue in arms control that has never been resolved and remains the subject of debate today.

Along with the seminars convened in classrooms of the Columbia Law School, there were the catered, glittering seminar dinner parties that Professor Gardner and his lovely wife and diplomatic partner, Danielle, hosted at their home on Fifth Avenue. These were marvelous affairs. Drawing on his inexhaustible reservoir of relationships, Professor Gardner would induce Pentagon arms control negotiators, the former Chairman of the Fed, the U.N. Secretary General, and countless other luminaries to dine with students and have a truly open and unscripted dialogue. For the foreign policy junkies who were part of Professor Gardner's orbit, these were truly coveted invitations.

Beyond his brilliance as an instructor, one of Professor Gardner's most admirable qualities was his loyalty to the cadres of students he remained close to long after they left Columbia. He was the quintessential mentor: always available to provide advice, facilitate introductions, and generally help us along our long journey from Columbia to points unknown. As I was completing my

Columbia doctoral dissertation in international relations and badly in need of a salary, Professor Gardner, as if by magic, found a fabulous opportunity for me to serve as the staff director to a blue-ribbon commission financed by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund on the role of the U.N. Security Council in strengthening the global nonproliferation regime. My chairman was McGeorge Bundy, National Security Adviser to President Kennedy and President Johnson. It was a was a fabulous opportunity, and I loved it. But I could accept it only under one condition. I must promise to finish my Columbia Ph.D. and not fall into the ranks of the dreaded ABD (All But Dissertation)!

I fulfilled my end of the bargain. And I was also told that I should no longer be so formal in our relationship. “Please call me Dick,” he said. And so I did for the years that followed, during which he grew beyond being a former professor and trusted mentor but also a cherished friend.

There were many memorable events, dinners, and of course lunches, always at the Century Association on 43rd Street, one of New York’s truly special old-world clubs, ostensibly dedicated to perpetuate the intellectual and cultural life of New York and beyond. I loved watching Dick work the room; he literally knew everyone. The biggest rock star of interest to me was the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and famed public intellectual Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a friend of Dick’s since the 1940’s at Harvard. Arthur had the same corner table each time. The hovering waiters prepared him a martini and a plate of khaki-colored vegetables followed by a steak. In later years, Arthur, as a result of Dick’s encouragement, became an important adviser for a book I wrote about White House decision-making and the escalation of the Vietnam War.

As Dick’s retirement from the Columbia faculty approached after a remarkable fifty-six-year run, I had an idea as incautious as it was ambitious. There should be a film tribute to Dick as seen through the prism of the generations of students he taught, inspired and, mentored. One caveat: Dick’s humility would never allow us to proceed, so it would be necessary to execute our plot surreptitiously. I recruited Dick and Danielle’s wonderful children, Nina and Tony, and my wife, Anne Ashby Gilbert, a journalist and film-maker, to this questionable mission. Somehow it worked. On the weekend in 2012 when a two-day celebration of his career brought former students to the Columbia Law School from across the country and around the world, we surprised—or perhaps even shocked—Dick with an unscheduled premier of the film. While taking no credit for its outcome, I believe this concise portrait captures aspects not only of Dick’s towering intellect and accomplishments as a scholar and a

diplomat but also his warmth, curiosity, generosity, and his simply undeniable human decency as a husband, father, mentor, and friend. At a gathering in Washington following his passing, a number of us watched the film again. For many of us it was a very emotional experience. A great man had exited the stage, with his legacy of a life extraordinarily well-lived for us to reflect on once again.