

Kal's Gift

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Kalman H. Silvert left this world prematurely after 55 intense years. He should have been with us many decades more. As his student, mentee, grantee, doubter, admirer, and collaborator, I was directly and profoundly enriched by Kal for the last 13 of those years. Today, 49 years after meeting Kalman Silvert, I continue to be influenced by him. During that time my thoughts about Kal, the nature of his influence and the character of his thinking have continually changed. Had Kal been with us additional decades his thinking doubtlessly would have continued to evolve. He would have been disappointed by many things that came to pass at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. He also would have been delighted and/or puzzled by many things, some of which would have been the same things which disappointed him. I wonder at how additionally inspired, frustrated, entertained, puzzled, enlightened, and amazed I would have been had Kal lived, as I had expected, into his 80s or more. Perhaps my greatest hope is that our relationship, which, in 1976, was just beginning to evolve from that of teacher and student, would have deepened into fuller personal friendship and affection. There is much I would have liked to have discussed and shared with Kal since 1976. He was such an inspiring and admired individual.

Knowing Kal was complicated. He presented himself unvarnished. Few people have so inspired my respect, have given me so much guidance, have I taken so seriously, or have so frustrated me as Kal. Kal rendered things directly with all of their human complexity, with gut-wrenching humor, and with the clear intention to inspire.

Frank "Pancho" Safford, the distinguished Colombianist historian, first told me about Kal. Pancho was finishing his first year as a Dartmouth assistant professor and I was ending my sophomore year, studying Latin American literature, preparing to travel to Mexico to work in a rural village with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) en route to a semester abroad at the Catholic University in Lima, Peru. Pancho said something like, "Things here at Dartmouth will be changed when you return from Peru. We will have a new and amazing Latin America specialist who will challenge all of our thinking about the region."

Pancho was right. For my last two years at Dartmouth I had a double major, Latin American literature and Kalman Silvert. I made an appointment to meet Kal in his Reed Hall office before classes started in January of 1963. I had signed up for his "Theory and Methods of Political Development" course and I wanted Kal to know about my six-year-old interest in Latin America. I had become fascinated with the region in 1957 when I began high school Spanish in Danbury, Connecticut. Since that time I had taken every course I could find and had read every book I could locate about Latin America. I had topped that off with my six months in Mexico and Peru. At Dartmouth there were few students focused on Latin America, although John Fishel also went to Mexico that summer with the AFSC and Donald Bross and Fernando DeNecochea shared the time in Lima which had been arranged by our Spanish language professor Robert Russell. My main Latin Americanist companions had been Professors Safford and Russell and the utterly amazing 3,000-square-foot "Epic of American Civilization" frescos that had been painted on the walls of the reserve corridor of Dartmouth's Baker Library in the 1930s by

the Mexican muralist Jose Clemente Orozco.

When I opened the door of Kal's office that snowy morning in January of 1963, Kal was 42. To me he was physically large, deadly serious, very mature, and highly intellectual. I was prepared to be in awe of his erudition and insight and expected him to be pleased with my interest in Latin America. What transpired was a brief, "nice to meet you" exchange. To my surprise I was the newcomer, just having returned to Dartmouth after six months abroad, and Kal was the established senior professor, already firmly set in his milieu. It was an important meeting but without the emotional impact I had expected.

The reading list for "Theory and Methods of Political Development" was like nothing I had ever before encountered. There were no books about Latin America per se. We were expected to read one book a week and to come to class prepared to discuss it, sometimes to actually lead the discussion. We started with Max Weber's *Methodology of Social Sciences*. That 1949 volume translated by Edward Shils and co-edited by Shils and Henry A. Finch is still read by me every year as I restart my teaching. We continued with books like Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society*, David McClelland's *The Achieving Society*, Tomás Fillol's *Social Factors in Economic Development*, and Everett Hagen's *On the Theory of Social Change*, published respectively in 1958, 1961, 1961, and 1962. These were new books destined to become classics. I had never before been challenged to analyze such works in my college classes. While such teaching is commonplace today among Kal's students and their academic offspring, this was new and exciting in Cold War/post-McCarthy era America.

The class discussion was equally uplifting. During the first session Kal started talking about something I thought I understood: institutions. But I quickly became confused. He was not talking about the Department of State or the Social Security Administration, but merely patterns of behavior that had become regularized. As a sociologist, really understanding the true nature and place of institutions, both formal and informal, later became a critical part of my intellectual apparatus. More important, as Kal pointed out, when we discussed Weber's *Methodology* (for weeks), concepts like "institution" are abstractions from presumed reality and merely represent attempts to communicate and describe what we believe we have observed. Mistaking these concepts for reality is to commit "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (from the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead), something that has plagued all-too-many scholars and many politicians. These and other insights, like there is no such thing as value-free social science, that hypotheses can be tested using metrics created from "ideal-types," that you can speculate about outcomes using something called a "counter-factual," were all taught to us by Kal in that amazing class, and taught through the mind of Max Weber. I still think about that class; I still reread Weber's work—and I am still learning about theory and method from Kal.

We also learned many things from Kal outside of class. If any of us took the United States for granted, we were disabused of that orientation after exposure to Kal Silvert. Kal loved to talk about his family, his wife Frieda, his sons Hank, Ben, and Alex and his parents Henry and Ida. He reminded us that his family, and all of our families, particularly those of us who, like Kal, were Jewish, would be living very different lives if we were in any country

other than the United States. Kal also told us that he was worried about the United States, whether it would offer the same prospects to future generations. He was particularly shaken by the lack of respect he found U.S. policy makers showing to democracy through their foreign policy. The not-so-hidden agenda of Kal's discussions of political development was that the political ideals of the United States could also grow in other nations and benefit humans around the world. He told us that he feared that the United States might not be working toward that goal in developing nations, something he had concluded regretfully when carrying out research for his 1954 monograph, *A Study in Government: Guatemala*.

Kal also taught us about development, largely using Latin America as his laboratory. Much of what he taught when he began at Dartmouth can be found in the books he published during those years: *The Conflict Society* (1961), *Expectant Peoples* (1963), and *Discussion at Bellagio* (1964). These works drew powerfully from his experience as associate and director of studies of the American Universities Field Staff. Founded in 1952, in its time AUFS was a cutting-edge organization designed to bring accurate knowledge about the rest of the world to the United States, especially to higher education. Supported by a few U.S.-based universities, it employed a dozen "experts" who lived and wrote from different parts of the world, shared their writings through the sponsoring universities, and then spent an academic year visiting those universities before returning for another cycle. Kal had lived and worked in Argentina for AUFS; he was AUFS's leading theorist; and he and his colleagues were at the forefront during those years of respectfully depicting "the other" to young Americans. Through his books and his AUFS writings Kal tried to

explain that the nationalism and the strangeness of developing nations need not be feared and that it could produce mature responsible nations and citizens if properly encouraged. He also tried to explain that development is a complex, asynchronous process and, in particular, that social and political development had to be understood together with, not derivative from, economic development. He also exposed us to a range of particular issues like education and development (examined in his co-authored 1961 AUFS monograph *Education and the Social Meaning of Development*), the limits of modernization as a process, and modernism as an individual attribute. All of this was cutting against the grain of development thinking in the 1960s—a time when the canon was Walt Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* and Alex Inkeles's concept "modernism."

During my remaining time at Dartmouth I got closer to Kal. He agreed to supervise "independent studies" and he advised me on where and how to apply to graduate school. Kal had attracted many of the best students in the Dartmouth Class of 1964, but I was the only one whom he encouraged to go on immediately in sociology. (His other students mainly applied to and were accepted by the best political science doctoral programs.) My interest in poverty alleviation and development in Latin America was key to Kal's advice about my future studies. I remember clearly Kal's advice about where to apply. He said something like, "You do not want to get a degree from what are known as the 'top-ranked' departments. There you will only get an 'establishment' education." He advised me to apply to departments that were challenging establishment views, so on Kal's advice I applied to Northwestern, Tulane, and Washington University in Saint Louis. To hedge my bets I also applied to

Michigan and Yale. In February 1964 I was surprised to receive a phone call from Leonard Reissman of Tulane's Sociology Department offering me admission and a full fellowship. Soon thereafter I received phone calls from Joseph Kahl of Washington University and Arnold "Akie" Feldman of Northwestern. From Michigan and Yale I received March letters offering fellowships. Reissman, Kahl, and Feldman were, like me, admirers of Kalman Silvert. While I eventually decided to study with Akie at Northwestern, I was later fortunate to meet and spend time with Kahl, Reissman, and many others of Kal's intellectual soulmates. I am not sure that I agree with Kal about where one might get, or not get, an "establishment education," but getting a doctorate in sociology under the direction of Kal's friend Akie Feldman in Northwestern's up-and-coming department became the next level of the professional foundation for a career initiated by the guidance of Kalman Silvert.

Before heading off to the far side of the Appalachians to commit myself to the study of a region no one else in my family had ever visited and a discipline that was new to me, I decided to look for validation from "gurus" whose work I had been introduced to by Kal and whom I held in the highest esteem. I never made it to Columbia to ask Frank Tannenbaum (and regretfully I never met him) but I did travel the 30 miles from Danbury to New Haven during spring break and was able to meet with Brazilianist historian Richard Morse and Caribbeanist anthropologist Sidney Mintz, both of Yale University. They listened to my plans for my future and both concurred that they seemed eminently feasible, and, with Kal's support, all the more so. (Both Richard and Sidney were still at Yale when I arrived as an assistant professor five years later and both had

significant additional impacts on my career.)

At Northwestern I set about trying to learn a discipline I had barely touched at Dartmouth. I had taken just one sociology course as an undergraduate and it had been taught by Bernard "Bernie" Segal, a young assistant professor specializing in medical sociology who completely changed his focus to Latin America after Kal Silvert became his senior colleague. I later came to spend "quality time" talking with Bernie about Kal and his magnetism when my wife Nancy and I arrived in Santiago, Chile, in August 1967 for my dissertation fieldwork and we began our time there living with Bernie, his wife Anne, and their children. When I was 14 I had had an idea that learning about Latin America would be a worthwhile endeavor. Kal had reinforced this mightily in me when I had just turned 20. He had gotten Bernie fascinated by Latin American social structure through his impassioned analyses and fascinating accounts. We were two of many. When I meet any of Kal's students, now decades after his untimely passing, we still talk about his impact and his vision.

In graduate school I wrote to Kal from time to time hoping to get his blessing for my intellectual trajectory. I even once had him meet my parents and my new wife Nancy so they could know the mentor whose intellectual depth had so influenced me. Reengaging with Kal always inspired me but it often also disappointed me. I never could tell if I had his approval, and I desperately wanted it. Kal so clearly articulated his thoughts about political development, about the value of freedom, about the place of the United States in the world, but when I told him about my work he simply listened. He did smile, he never denied me an opportunity to talk, but I

never got the definitive approval I so wanted.

Kal continued to be my totem after graduate school. He was a reference when I landed my first academic position, in Yale's Sociology Department, but he surprised me when I learned from another source that he had left Dartmouth to go to New York City to take a position at New York University and to advise the Ford Foundation. Kal had said that he had left Tulane in 1962 because he thought that at Dartmouth he could influence generations of elite individuals who would impact United States relations with Latin America and the rest of the world. From what I understood, Kal was achieving that at Dartmouth. The best students and the best faculty were seeking him out to help frame their careers and their ideas about the world. I was disappointed that that would not continue at a place where he seemed so successfully established, but I later understood that Kal imagined he could have the best of both worlds. Living in New York, teaching at NYU, advising the Ford Foundation and maintaining his home in Norwich, Vermont, Kal thought he could broaden his impact and maintain his Dartmouth ties.

Perhaps Kal was right. That decision also allowed me to reconnect with him. In 1972 I was invited to succeed Bryce Wood as director of the Social Science Research Council's Latin America Program. This allowed me to work directly with scholars like Albert Hirschman, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Osvaldo Sunkel, all of whom I idolized. It also required that I write proposals every year requesting Ford Foundation support. The person in charge of reviewing the annual SSRC request was none other than Kalman Silvert. My conversations with Kal about those proposals fell into a familiar pattern.

They would be approved without much comment except for explanations about the levels which Ford's budget could support in those years of high inflation.

In 1973 this did change. Both the SSRC and Ford concluded that social science in Latin America and dialogue between North and South America could best be sustained by ensuring that highly capable Latin American scholars be able to continue their careers. This was being made increasingly difficult (sometimes fatally) by the repression of intellectuals by Latin American military regimes. As a result Bryce Wood was asked to head an effort to rescue Latin American scholars whose lives and careers were threatened and to place them in countries where they could continue their work. Kal led this effort for Ford and I was the lead for SSRC. Given the nature of our institutions, the work had to sustain social science, not politics, so great care and planning needed to be carried out by our offices and by the hundreds of individuals who became involved with the effort. I believe that much good social science was sustained by this effort; that many lives were sustained and physically saved; and that future Latin American politics and U.S.-Latin American relations benefitted. Many of those rescued became political and intellectual leaders in their countries when it was safe to return. Kal was always clear-eyed about what we were doing. He believed that cosmopolitan individuals committed to social justice were essential for improving the human condition, and he made sure that Ford understood the benefits that would result from our efforts. In the midst of the Cold War this required nuance and persistence to make sure that as many scholars as possible were rescued and that the governing boards and top leadership of Ford and SSRC understood that our work was enhancing prospects for science-based knowledge

creation. This was essential as we transferred funds internationally, worked with U.S. and other officials to obtain visas for these scholars, bargained with universities to find them employment, and helped volunteers in North America, Latin America, and Europe to help them and their families adjust to new circumstances, often following harrowing experiences. Once again Kal and I did not talk much about what we were doing, but the resulting actions spoke for themselves.

On October 17, 1976, I received a phone call telling me that a memorial service would be held for Kalman Silvert in the Maison Française in New York near the Ford and SSRC offices. In disbelief I learned that Kal had suffered a massive heart attack while driving back to New York from his home in Norwich. The next day I went to the ceremony. The room overflowed despite the short notice required by Jewish burial tradition. I stood in the crowd. I listened to the eulogies. I offered my condolences to Frieda and her sons. I was dumbfounded. I had suffered a great loss, and the loss of many there was far greater than mine. Mine was that I would lose Kal's counsel, his hoped-for future friendship, and that I would never gain the unambiguous approval I had sought from him for 13 years. Now that I reflect, perhaps that denial of approval was intended as Kal's gift. He let me find my own way; he accompanied me on my path without dictating its direction; he let me be myself. Thank you, Kal. ■