



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

This “early edition” of the *Connection* is dedicated to our good friend and colleague, SIU Carbondale Interim Chancellor Paul Sarvela, whose untimely passing is mourned by the SIU family and many, many others he touched with his kindness and compassion.

In thinking about a meaningful way to honor Paul here, I turned to John Haller, who is serving the SIU System as a special consultant covering those duties of the vice president for academic affairs — Paul’s position before assuming the SIUC chancellorship. As you will see, Paul and John shared far more than professional bonds, and I hope you find John’s remembrance below to be as touching as I did. My gratitude goes to John for sharing this very personal story. I also hope you will join me in continuing to keep Paul’s wife, Deb, and their children, Kristin and John, in your thoughts and prayers.

I’ll be back in this space on December 3. Ronda and I wish our Thanksgiving best to all of the SIU family and — particularly at this time — we hope you have an opportunity to connect with friends and loved ones during the holiday.

Randy Dunn

REMINISCENCES OF PAUL SARVELA Contributed by John Haller

Reflecting on Paul Sarvela’s sudden and unexpected death, I have taken to rereading Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s autobiography *Living to Tell the Tale*, as it is particularly comforting after the loss of a friend or loved one. My interest in the book lies in the rich seam of personal memories Marquez evokes, drawing from them not only to shape the characters and events that distinguish his stories but to also better understand himself. One is left with a feeling of warmth and nostalgia for the world and the events that evoked such writing.

In a particular phrase at the outset of his autobiography, Marquez remarks that “Life is not what one lives, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it.” That quote has brought me over and over again to reflecting on my own life and how the people who — past and present — I have known and admired have affected me in different ways.

Thinking about Paul, it struck me that many of our lives have been and will continue to be enriched by our memories of him — his open and welcoming smile, his laugh which almost always preceded his

presence (one always knew when Paul was in the building), his joy of life and of family, his love of music, and his gift of treating everyone with equal measure. He had a curiosity and love of life that was infectious to all who knew him.

There were others like Ed Benyas, Paul Bennett, Scott McClatchey, and Dale Ritzel, to name just a few, who knew Paul and his family better than I did. But Paul was my best friend and biking partner for years. On Saturdays when the weather was good, or Sundays after he returned from church, we met on the Makanda Boardwalk or at my home to begin a ride that was not so much determined by the miles we travelled as by our conversation. Comfortable with each other's thoughts and opinions, we used our time together to discuss everything from family events to campus and global issues. For Paul, family came first before anything else, and he always began our conversations by talking about his kids, Kristin and John.

I will never forget the Sarvela Family October Fest parties at their home in Carbondale. Replete with beer, brats and a band — and a Finnish sauna for those bold enough to try — he and Deb presided over what became an annual event for his many friends and co-workers. Those who participated in the “wife carrying” competition never forgot his insistence that each man carry his *own* wife over the course — and no choosing the lightest or smallest woman present.

Paul was a proud alumnus of the University of Michigan where he earned all three of his degrees: A.B., M.S. and Ph.D. Following a short two-year stint as program evaluator for Ford Aerospace and Communications Corporation, he came to SIU in 1986. As a member of the Department of Health Education in the College of Education and Clinical Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine in the School of Medicine, Paul had built an impressive dossier of peer-reviewed research as well as chaired or co-chaired thirty-two thesis and dissertation committees and served as member on another eighty-three.

I first met Paul when he was Director of the Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development where he managed several dozen full- and part-time staff, and administered more than \$2.5 million in grants and contracts. In need of an expert to conduct assessment of rural health care provider needs that could serve the Southern Illinois region, I reached out to Paul, who became an invaluable source of information. His involvement in this university-wide committee sparked a chord that became a trademark of Paul's subsequent life, namely, a desire to broaden his role in the life of the University and in the lives and welfare of Southern Illinoisans.

His experience on this committee led to his nomination and appointment to the prestigious Fellows Program sponsored by the American Council on Education, giving him a year's experience in the University of Wisconsin System learning the nuances of higher education administration from some of the nation's leading administrators. Shortly after returning from his fellowship, Paul was appointed Chair of the Department of Health Education in the College of Education and later Dean of the College of Applied Sciences and Arts, bringing to both positions a wealth of energy and new ideas. During his tenure as Dean he restructured the College from seven departments to four schools, and developed and implemented a number of new programs including Medical Dosimetry, the Master of Architecture, and the MS in Physician Assistant. He also raised \$8.1 million in cash and gifts-in-kind during SIUC's comprehensive fundraising campaign.

When I retired in 2008 after eighteen years as VPAA for the SIU System, Paul took my place and, in doing so, put his mark on the office in ways that I could never have dreamed. And he did so with modesty and

with an openness of heart. Those with whom he interacted, whether within the SIU system or at the state or regional level, loved his easy and open manner but knew that beneath that hearty laugh was a wealth of insight and common sense.

The staff at Stone Center remembers Paul fondly but none more so than Antoinette Moyers, who served both of us as the "Office Grammarian." Upon learning of Antoinette's 50th birthday, Paul surprised her with a troop of office mates marching in New Orleans style down the hall to her office with Paul leading the way with a trumpet rendition of "Happy Birthday."

When President Dunn appointed Paul Interim Chancellor of SIUC, I could not help but believe that he was the right man for the right job and at the University he so much loved. Who could have thought that a man so much admired and with so much energy would have his life cut so short?

I carried the news of Paul's health problems with me long before it became public. In a strange way, we discovered it together in one of our bike trips when he was having difficulty keeping pace with me and his son John. I kept saying to him: "You're twenty years younger than me! Why are you struggling to keep up?" Little did we know the consequences of that remark until he had the results of blood-work taken a few weeks later. What followed were numerous visits to labs and to the Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis. All the while, Paul kept his eye on the prize, namely his return to health and commitment to his new job. That he chose to show that commitment by attending a ball game on campus the evening prior to his death is certainly exemplary of that dedication.

For those of us who stood vigil at the hospital on hearing of Paul's condition, the singular question in our minds seemed to be the tragic irony of a man who loved his institution so much but had so little time to serve as its leader. Yet, despite his short time as Chancellor, Paul more than compensated with twenty-eight years of dedicated service.

As I learned from Marquez, talking or writing about Paul is an exercise in remembering and it is an exercise that I will continually savor, for doing so not only allows me to recall wonderful moments in the intersection of our two lives, but remembering him will no doubt deepen my own understanding of life. This guy, your chancellor and my biking buddy, was as large in life as he is now in my memories. I have no doubt these memories will continue to be a living part of who I am and, equally so, a very real part of our collective lives and of the SIU family.