

Lowenstein Death Had Roots in Bitter 60's

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

Nearly three years ago, Allard K. Lowenstein described his friend and protégé Dennis Sweeney — the man accused of murdering him in his law office here last Friday — as a tragic figure who had been “permanently damaged” by the ideological struggles of movement politics in the 1960's.

In a tape-recorded interview on May 6, 1977 with Prof. Clayborne Carson of Stanford University, Mr. Lowenstein told how Mr. Sweeney had gone to Mississippi to join the civil rights struggle in 1963 after he, Mr. Lowenstein, had been arrested there. Mr. Lowenstein was then 34 and Mr. Sweeney 20.

And Mr. Lowenstein recounted their parting in “ugly circumstances” two years later when Mr. Sweeney took the radical side with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the debate with reformers represented by Mr. Lowenstein. Mr. Sweeney and his wife were later purged from the committee, along with the other remaining whites, Mr. Lowenstein related.

‘Very Badly Damaged’

“He became very much the spearhead of their campaign against me in a lot of ways,” Mr. Lowenstein said in his compassionate account of the events. “They ended up accusing him of all the things they had accused me of, except it was done after he had put all his emotion into S.N.C.C., and it very, very badly damaged him.”

In the interview, Mr. Lowenstein said

In 1977, He Expressed Concern for Associate Now Held in Slaying

he and Mr. Sweeney had lost touch until about 1975, when he received a telephone call from Philadelphia.

“He called me out of the blue to tell me people were trying to kill him,” Mr. Lowenstein went on. “It was a very sad sort of end to a very talented person that hacked out the fillings in his teeth because he said the C.I.A. would use the fillings to damage his brain. He just simply had gotten to the point where I don't know if there was any way he could be reclaimed from this tragedy.”

Mr. Lowenstein spoke to Professor Carson for the professor's forthcoming book, “In Struggle: S.N.C.C. and the Black Awakening of the 60's,” and he presented Mr. Sweeney's story as an example of the fevered times.

“What I'm saying about it is that if you understand all of that, there isn't any way you can underestimate the reasonableness of going crazy,” Mr. Lowenstein concluded.

‘Brilliant’ and ‘Exceptional’

The paths that were to converge began at Stanford in 1961. Mr. Lowenstein, a former president of the National Student Association and national chairman of Students for Stevenson in 1952, was assistant

dean of men and instructor in political science at the university. Mr. Sweeney was a freshman studying history on an academic scholarship, described by his teachers as “brilliant” and “exceptional.” His father had been killed in an accident in the Army, and he had been adopted by a stepfather, Gabriel Sweeney, in Portland, Ore., when he was 14.

“He had a sensitive mind, which was not unusual then, but he also had a subtle mind, which was,” said Charles Dreke-meier, a political science professor who taught Mr. Sweeney in an honors course. “He will always be one of my favorite and best remembered students.”

Mr. Lowenstein, whose name was later to become a byword for political activism, had attracted a circle of idealistic young men around him at Stanford. One of his early projects was to establish a National Student Association chapter on campus. Mr. Sweeney was the head of the pilot organization.

Call to Mississippi

By 1963 civil rights had overshadowed all other causes. That summer Mr. Sweeney worked in voter registration projects in Jackson, Miss., and Memphis. Mr. Lowenstein, who had by then left Stanford to practice law, was legal adviser to the projects.

In December 1963, Mr. Lowenstein was arrested in Mississippi for his registration activities, and he issued a call to Stanford students to go to the state and

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work full time. Mr. Sweeney was one of the first to respond.

"Those were incredible days," Professor Drekeimer recalled. "It seemed like every morning there was a busload of workers leaving from one dormitory or the other."

Mr. Sweeney, an athletic-looking six-footer, settled in at McComb, Miss., probably the most dangerous post in the state. He was twice injured slightly in bomb attacks on movement headquarters and was arrested at least a half dozen times in the harassing tactics used then by the authorities. By mid-1964 Mr. Sweeney was the highest ranking white in S.N.C.C. and known as one of its bravest workers.

The summer of 1964 was a time of great tension in the movement. Some, like Mr. Sweeney and most of the others in the organization, had become radicalized. They believed that destruction of American institutions and a new start, rather than attempts to work within the institutions to reform them, was the solution. Mr. Lowenstein, by then a board member of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s

Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was attacked by dissidents as a "traitor" and "sellout."

What probably broke the movement apart more than any other event was the attempt to seat a Mississippi delegation representative of the state's black voters at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City in August 1964. Mr. Lowenstein led the forces of moderation, which ultimately accomplished little against the all-white Mississippi power structure.

By 1965 the black power movement was in full surge in S.N.C.C. Mr. Sweeney and his wife, Mary E. King, a fellow worker in the organization, were soon back in California. Their marriage did not long survive separation from the movement.

One friend said Mr. Sweeney had been "wasted" by his southern experience. He drove a truck for Stanford but did not return seriously to his studies. For a time he lived with David Harris, the antiwar leader, and participated in the draft resistance movement.

One professor remembers seeing Mr. Sweeney at a rally against the Central Intelligence Agency in 1967. In that year it had been disclosed that the C.I.A. had been financing the National Student As-

sociation when Mr. Lowenstein's influence in it was still great. Most of the New Left labeled Mr. Lowenstein a C.I.A. agent at that time.

Mr. Sweeney drifted from job to job in Palo Alto, living briefly in a commune. His life followed no course when he returned to Portland. "He would work with people and then begin to get feelings that they were out to get him," recalls Charles Hinkle, a Portland friend of the time.

In 1973 Mr. Harris heard that Mr. Sweeney's parents were about to commit him to a state mental hospital. Mr. Harris raised \$3,000 so that Mr. Sweeney could go for private treatment.

"It didn't work out," Mr. Harris said. "I don't know what happened."

Professor Drekeimer saw Mr. Sweeney in Portland around 1973. "We talked for several hours about his marriage, about Stanford, about commitment to something and how the academic world betrays it — for him and for me," he said. "He only lived in the past. He felt there was no place to go — the people he trusted had deserted him."

None of Mr. Sweeney's movement friends could recall having seen him in the last six or seven years. When Mr.

Lowenstein was shot, home for Mr. Sweeney was a spotless, spartan-furnished room in New London, Conn. Neighbors could not remember seeing him drink, or use drugs, or go out with women.

"When he talked, he never looked at you," said Richard Mender, who visited Mr. Sweeney's room several times.

Mr. Sweeney's stepfather died on Feb. 24 in Portland, and he attended the funeral there. When he returned, according to the police, he bought a Spanish-made pistol at a local store and called Mr. Lowenstein for an appointment at 4 P.M. last Friday. The police said he told them later that Mr. Lowenstein had been part of a lawsuit that had led to his stepfather's death, but there is no evidence of such a suit. At his arraignment, the prosecution asserted that Mr. Sweeney had said he had a list of six people he was out to get.

Until Mr. Sweeney entered Mr. Lowenstein's office at 50 Rockefeller Plaza last Friday, the last known contact between them was a letter that Mr. Sweeney was said to have written about six months ago. Mr. Lowenstein's secretary recalled it as "somewhat hostile." His aides are still searching for it in the lawyer's files.

After the shooting on Friday, according to witnesses, Mr. Sweeney emerged coolly from the office, placed the gun on a desk and sat down to light a cigarette.

"I asked him if he had a gun," said Robert Layton of Layton & Steward, Mr. Lowenstein's law firm. "He said very calmly, 'I'm not armed anymore.'"