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Vintage Lowenstein

In what proved to be his last battle, as in so many of his earlier fights, Allard K. Lowenstein came up with a line that was so right, so funny and so barbed that you just savored it.

Representing Sen. Edward Kennedy in a surrogate debate in Bangor, Maine, just before the February caucuses, he was talking about the folly in the war fever the Carter administration was whipping up about the Persian Gulf, about the ridiculous spectacle of national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski rushing over to the Pakistan-Afghan border and waving an automatic rifle melodramatically toward the Soviet invaders.

"I expected any minute," Lowenstein jibed, "to hear him about, 'Ich bin ein Khyber Passer.'"

I complimented him on the line when I saw him a few days later at a similar debate in New Hampshire and, looking a bit pleased with it himself, he introduced his young son, who was out campaigning with him that evening.

I saw him again, for the last time, on television in Florida, talking to the Jews in Miami, telling them they should reject Carter, not on the narrow grounds of the snafu on the U.N. resolution, but because his social and economic policies contradicted the values for which they had stood for years.

That, too, was vintage Lowenstein, motivating people to act, but insisting that they base their action on the broadest context of principle and, yes, morality—not on narrow self-interest.

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to those of us contemporaries who lacked his capacity for perpetual rejuvenation. To a greater extent than any public man I have ever known, Lowenstein was constantly and inseparably linked to the young people of this society, drawing his energy from them and giving them back inspiration and direction. From his NSA days, to the civil rights and anti-war movements, to the dump-Johnson campaign, and until the moment of his death, it is beyond dispute that he brought more young people into American politics than any other individual of our times.

His opinions and attitudes were often as outrageous as his habit of scheduling a midnight appointment—then arriving four hours late and pounding indignantly on your door if you had fallen asleep.

His enthusiasms often led him to wildly inconsistent positions. As his devoted friend, Sam Brown, pointed out in a New Hampshire debate, Lowenstein may have been unique as a Democrat who had campaigned with passionate conviction, but at different times, for all three of

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That is how I first remember him, more than 30 years ago, the strange, intense youth from the University of North Carolina who came to the University of Chicago to drum up interest in a National Student Association, whose purpose, he insisted, would not be merely the protection of student rights, but the struggle for racial and economic justice in the nation and the world.

Ours was a campus full of activists, but none of us had seen quite the demonic intensity, the 24-hour-a-day purposefulness of this visitor. The girl I then dated and later married succumbed, and went off with Lowenstein to a convention in Ann Arbor, convinced she was about to save the world.

Up in Maine, six weeks ago, I met another young woman who, quite starry-eyed, disclosed that she had spent the previous weekend driving Lowenstein on his ceaseless round of meetings. I thought—but did not say—"He's bewitched you, just as surely as he bewitched a woman old enough to be your mother."

That quality in Lowenstein was a bit venacious

this year's Democratic candidates—Jimmy Carter, Jerry Brown and Ted Kennedy.

But he was more eclectic than that. Encountering George Bush in New Hampshire, he told his former House colleague that he was "anxious to get together" with him. Lowenstein would try to convert anyone to his cause.

Strange as it is to say of a man with such a legion of devoted friends, individuals were less important to him than causes. That may explain why his friendships ranged so broadly. Don Rumfeld, the hawkish former secretary of defense, was a House gym wrestling buddy of Lowenstein's and a friend. Conservative Bill Buckley was another friend, and wrote a courageous column defending Lowenstein against the Red sneers that were invariably used against him in his many losing House campaigns.

They responded, as did almost anyone who ever met Lowenstein, to the irresistible appeal of a man who shared with everyone his own intense enjoyment of the political arena and his unquenchable faith that in this nation, politics might bring defeat, but never despair.

The passion for the good cause, well-fought, that Al Lowenstein brought to every battle, will live on, despite the bullets that stopped his strong heart.

It is his legacy to the uncounted thousands he enticed, cajoled, badgered and bulldozed into the political life of America. As long as they fight for their causes, his spirit will live on.