

Pat
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He Made a Difference

Of the innumerable people who knew Al Lowenstein, and who were weeping Friday night when we learned he had been shot and killed in New York, I was far from the closest confidant. I was just one of many who, with some reason, called themselves "a friend of Al's"—one member of that small army whose lives he had changed.

I remember how sleepy a place Stanford was, politically, when he arrived there as an associate dean during my sophomore year, nearly two decades ago. It was clear from the first time you met him that he couldn't be pigeonholed. One day he would be defeating a South African official in a debate on apartheid, with devastating logic and quick wit. The next day the head of an Eastern European government-in-exile would be telling a conference of astonished campus conservatives that Al Lowenstein was the most effective opponent of communism in America. A liberal in the finest sense of that tradition, he was both colorblind and a patriot. He fought racism, not racists—the latter, he always thought, might be converted. He fought the abuse of American power, not America. He wore

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that American flag lapel pin in later years with pride.

His targets among the students were the bright-eyed Midwestern WASPs, the jocks, the serious engineers, the people like me, who normally would never have thought of getting involved in politics, civil rights or any of his other passions. He went where they were—the fraternity houses, the gyms (he was a superb wrestler), the religious-group meetings. His message was always the same, whatever the particular issue that fired him up that month: you can make a difference, make the system work, get outside yourself, there is a lot to be done.

He had no instinct for the jugular, a trait that probably doomed his own political career. He was never really comfortable or happy working to promote himself during his own congressional campaigns, and he was never as good at that as he was at mobilizing those armies of college kids behind some larger cause, such as racial justice.

The political cliché "Don't get mad, get even," was entirely alien to him—he always allowed for the possibility of redemption. He'd come back again and again. If you disagreed with him on foreign policy, he'd get you involved with civil rights. If not this month, next.

After a few years, when you got married and went to graduate school



or started work, he didn't really expect you to make the grand sacrifices of time needed to go organize voter registration drives and the like with him, but he'd still call or write now and then. His records of telephone numbers and addresses—like his day-to-day schedule and plans—were always hopelessly chaotic and out of date, so you were forever getting post cards mailed on his last trip to South Africa four months late, forwarded three times. Occasionally, you'd still get a call at some odd time of night from yet another college sophomore, 15 years your junior, who was doing what you once did—attempting the impossible task of coordinating Al's travel and meetings. The kid had just been told to call you and ask you if you could pick Al up at the airport in half an hour and take him to so-and-

so's apartment. As you drove to the airport in the middle of the night, you'd wonder if you weren't too old for all this. But the 20 minutes in the car with him were always worth it. Listening to him describe his newest cause and his next moves—which were eternally changing and which he shared with everyone—you got a whiff of delicious nostalgia for the time years ago when you and he had slain that season's dragon together. And even when his newest effort sounded outlandish or absolutely hopeless, you remembered ruefully how you had told him knowingly in the fall of 1967 that he would never be able to use a presidential candidacy by an unknown senator to defeat a sitting president and turn the country against the Vietnam War.

As the generations of college

sophomores passed through his tutelage and he entered middle age, it began to become apparent what he was—not the politician, lawyer, academic or author he sometimes tried to be, but a peripatetic one-man school for several generations of Americans. The examples in his course varied constantly. Some were well chosen, some not. But the underlying lesson plan had only two main themes, always the same: First, that this crazy lovable country can work, but it's up to you. Second, the lesson Learned Hand said that mankind "has never learned, but has never quite forgotten; that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard and considered side by side with the greatest."

Goodbye, Al. And thanks.
We'll take it from here.