

A Eulogy for Dr. Taher Razik

BY BRUCE HILYARD (Ph.D. '88, Educational Research and Evaluation)

I recently spoke with several graduates from Dr. Razik's program and our reminiscences fell into three broad categories: what it was like to be in the program, what it was like after completing the degree work, and the broader connections that grew out of our experience.

IN PROGRAM

Dr. Razik drew students from places around the globe. This lent the program a particular flavor that was not commonly available. He was a man who bridged worlds and cultures. He provided neutral space for some to meet and work together who could have been in conflict elsewhere.

To participate in one of Dr. Razik's courses was to be challenged, to have to read and think and write in ways that earlier

educational experiences may not have called for. The courses provided both practical applications and the broad theory that lay behind those applications. That theoretical base allowed students to move on to a much wider variety of roles than a program that was simply application-based could have.

Dr. Razik pushed students to achieve their maximum. That maximum was often greater than the students themselves believed. He would assist, and he would push when he felt it was necessary.

continued on next page ►

A Eulogy for Dr. Taher Razik

continued from page 19

“He would give a gentle nudge...sometimes not so gentle...and we got through,” one alumnus said. “We have our degrees because he was there.”

“What was most important was his unique ability to bring out what was special in each of us. That helped me to see what I could do,” said another alumnus.

There was no question he was in charge. Like others before and after me, I served as a graduate assistant for Dr. Razik. When he was on the road as a consultant, he would tell those he left behind to operate the program until his expected return. I learned fast to expect him a day or so early, and that it was best to have things in good order in advance of his announced day of arrival. It kept us on our toes.

“The relationship after graduation was more mentor than colleague,” said one alumnus, “but it was more than simply mentor. He cared very much for people who counted on him, and enjoyed sharing students’ lives.”

AFTER GRADUATION

To complete Dr. Razik’s program was to enter on a lifelong mutual commitment for many of us. More times than I care to count I would answer the telephone and hear his voice say, “Hello, Dr. Hilyard. Are you working hard or hardly working?” I learned quickly not to say “hardly working” lest I suddenly discover that I was “working hard.”

He made unabashed use of us as resources and as hands. But he reciprocated with unabashed support.

“The relationship after graduation was more mentor than colleague,” said one alumnus, “but it was more than simply mentor. He cared very much for people who counted on him, and enjoyed sharing students’ lives.”

Dr. Razik took interest in our professional activities.

One alumnus who did consulting work overseas called him “a formidable consultant. The very mention of his name caused the red carpet to be rolled out for me. People took me seriously because he had such respect. I had to be careful not to overuse that power. But I felt very confident because of his careful mentoring. He wanted us to know what to do.”

He often would talk over professional issues with his graduates, giving advice and directions. “He didn’t hesitate to be sure that we knew our errors,” said one alumnus, “but it was in

a positive rather than a negative way.”

“I learned how to be feisty about the status quo because he was. He wanted to be sure things were done right. That taught me you could raise questions. He was not only a doer but a shaker. That took courage,” said another alumnus.

BROADER CONNECTIONS

Dr. Razik has a family in whom he took great pride. But he also created a second family of another kind, one made up of people that he worked with and about whom he genuinely cared.

“He was very much there for us when we needed him,” said one alumnus whose family had suffered tragedy.

“He and Mrs. Razik were very gracious. They made you feel comfortable in their home and in their presence,” said another alumnus. “I went to the picnic not sure what to expect, maybe a little bit because it was expected that I go. But I kept going, looking forward to seeing them.”

I have an old list of students that Dr. and Mrs. Razik had used to issue the invitations to their summer picnic every year. There were names of 68 people whom he had helped to get master’s and doctoral degrees. I have heard that the full list would be somewhere over 80 names. That’s 80 adopted families scattered across the globe...a tremendous network...and a tremendous accomplishment.

WHAT I LEARNED

I would like to explain two things that I learned from Dr. Razik...two things that went well beyond course content.

I learned from him that I could persist beyond reason and perhaps common sense in pursuit of a goal...degree completion. I started the program in mid-life, and it took me nine years to complete. I would never have persisted that long in the effort if I had not been working with a person like Dr. Razik. I simply could not say to him, “I quit.”

I came into the program saying to him that I was interested in part because I was curious to learn how people from other nations and cultures thought, what they were like. He simply smiled and did not respond. But rather than difference, I found commonality—the commonality of being human, of working toward a goal, of shared values in teaching and learning.

Perhaps learning about commonality was the greatest lesson of them all. ●



BRUCE HILYARD