

**Paul Kostecki
(1950-2021)**

Early in my time at UMass Amherst, I was walking from Hillside towards Whitmore, when this guy came running out of a nearby building and stopped me to talk. I no longer remember what he wanted to talk about, probably academic politics, research administration, or the like, but I had no idea who he was, what he did, or why we were having this intense morning conversation in the middle of a peaceful downhill walk to campus. That was Paul Kostecki: energetic, passionate, committed, and direct. No formality of a requested appointment or a request for an official engagement for some purpose.

As everyone here knows, Paul accumulated a remarkable academic career while building an entrepreneurial operation of significance, reach, and success. The record of this scholarly achievement is clear, public, and well known. But for me, Paul represents something else. He stood for the sometimes lost art of friendship. Not the friendship of advantage, or of opportunity. Not the friendship of connections and relationships, but the friendship of being.

The elements of this connection were in some ways ordinary and unimpressive. Breakfast at Stables, a shared trip to the dump, an excursion to Wagner Wood for a load of firewood. We met with some frequency, sometimes at my place often at his. We admired his boats and their trailers, we talked about trucks, we heard about each other's families. Nothing profound, no transactions of significance, simply a conversation that never ended but just kept going over time, distance, and the changes in the world around us.

For reasons I have never understood, Paul wanted to team teach my university management graduate course, teach without compensation, without recognition, simply by showing up and participating regularly once a week for the seminar. He always claimed it was fun, but after a while I suspected he participated to support me with companionship and friendship that carried no obligation and could be made to appear as beneficial to him. It wasn't for himself that he did it for the years that the course continued, he did it out of friendship for me.

Paul had a remarkable ability to find the right people for the right purpose. Whether it was for stone or paint or wood or some other artisan quality, Paul found a guy, and not only found a guy, but made that guy an informal partner in whatever project was involved. Walking around this yard, I can hear him tell me about this item, place, or person and that item, place, and person, here and abroad, where he had found just the

right thing to be brought home and installed to enhance some artistic or garden effect that would never have occurred to me.

In hanging out with Paul, we shared various small chores related to our home operations. When I needed an extra hand, Paul, in the spirit of the friendship we shared, simply showed up and we did what needed to be done. No big deal, no commotion, no elaborate scheduling, just a text message, and he was there or I was here, and we did what was needed.

Friendship is complicated and often apparently unremarkable because it requires a constant shared experience, a shared set of unspoken core values, and an acceptance of whatever is or will be. Paul didn't ask for anything as my friend, he gave of himself to participate in a low key but constant way in my life, he engaged me without obligation or formality in his life and with his family. We brushed by political issues, some of which we agreed about and others probably not so much, but these served more as background noise to the participatory character of our time together.

Perhaps I took his talent for friendship for granted then as it was so easy to enjoy, but today, as we celebrate Paul Kostecki, the absence of his spirit and inspiration reflects a fundamental and likely irreplaceable loss.

John V. Lombardi
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