
One of the hardest parts of living a long life is witnessing the passing of friends, loved ones, and stand-out colleagues who at one time or another served in the trenches with you during times of great challenge. These difficult events come more often now…too often, in fact…and it is painful. With these occasions, we lose another chapter in the living memory of our own personal histories.

We are all here today to mourn the loss and celebrate the life of a remarkable man, a man whose extraordinary passion for his city, spirit of public service, and rare concern for our homeless and mentally ill citizens will not soon be forgotten. As we all know, these populations of our city are often viewed as a burden, or troublesome presence – to Marty, they were always deserving of our greatest attention and care.

I was privileged to know Marty since our time as district leaders in the 1960’s, and I always admired him. In times like these, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr used to remind us that:

“Death is not a period
that ends the great sentence of life,
but a comma
that punctuates it to more lofty significance…
dead is not a blind alley
that leads into a state of nothingness,
but an open door
which leads into life eternal.”

Who knows how many people Marty was able to assist in his lifetime. He was absolutely fearless when it came to taking up the mantle for the disenfranchised or anyone in need – no matter the race, ethnicity, strata or circumstance - Marty truly cared about all people. For that very reason, Marty’s legacy of service will live forever.

The roster of organizations and avenues through which Marty shared his expertise and provided his services included:

the Baruch School of Public Affairs, the Parks Council of New York City, the American Red Cross of Greater New York, and the New York City Economic Development Corporation;
he was Chairman of the Community Services Board of New York City’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, and President of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York;

he served on the New York State Hospital Review and Planning Council, on the Task Force on Police Community Relations, and on Governor Pataki’s Task Force on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century.

Martin was a Member of the Battery Park City Authority, the New York City Campaign Finance Board, and was appointed to the New York City Korean War 50th Anniversary Commemorative Commission,

Prior to becoming a partner in Reiter/Begun, and then President and Founder of MSB Strategies, Martin gave his longest tenure of service -- more than 35 years – to New York University’s School of Medicine and Medical Center as Senior Associate Dean and Vice President for External Affairs.

What I have accounted for is only an abbreviated roster of Marty’s notable commitments and does not even account for all of his writings and advocacy work through private organizational involvements.

Marty did not act from personal pride or political pragmatism, he was guided by an abiding commitment to the future promise of all citizens of New York. He gave more than lip service to his belief that we all must shoulder the responsibility for everyone, including the sick, the powerless, and vulnerable.

Marty worked long and hard to ensure that this city…his city…met that measure. And in so doing, he touched the lives of more people than we will ever know. And now, we are here out of respect for the intense strength of Martin’s beliefs, the lasting impact of his actions, and the many services he performed for others in his unassuming fashion. We gather out of love for this uncommon man.

It’s true that we have no power over death, but we do have power over life – the power to live it to its fullest. And so today, as we mourn the loss of Martin Begun, let us also celebrate a life well-lived, one filled with generosity and spirit and warmth. And let us be thankful that we were fortunate enough to share it. Marty fought a good fight, he finished his course, he kept the faith.

We all thought the world of Marty, and we have many reasons to mourn his passing. Yet, his life gives us so much more to celebrate because he left us all with more than memories – he left us the rich legacy of his friendship, a legacy of caring, and a legacy of doing for others. And we know that he would want us to look beyond our tears and rededicate ourselves to creating a world free of inequities, intolerance…and free of the barriers to anyone’s success. Marty, we will miss you… the City of New York is a better place because you were here.

It is said, my friends, that service to others is the rent we pay for our space on earth. Martin Begun departed us paid in full. Let him not look down and find any of us in arrears.

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