

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

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Philosophy is Everybody's Business

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In Memorium



Max Weismann
1936-2017

**Max Weismann's *Festschrift*:
"My Memories of Max" by Dr. Diana Sheets**

My first contact with Max Weismann occurred in response to an online Q & A interview in January of 2009 that I had with Dr. Michael F. Shaughnessy, then Senior Columnist at EdNews.org. Our discussion touched upon Alex Beam's book *A Great Idea at the Time*, which mocked the accomplishment of the Great Books and regarded the movement it engendered almost as if it were a bizarre secular tribe that lived on some distant planet. Beam's irreverent treatment of Robert Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and the Great Books program caused Max to write a scathing online response. Unfortunately, his comment was not saved. Nor was mine, which was written in support of his criticism.

The following year I mailed Max two copies of a book edited by Dr. Shaughnessy entitled *Reading in 2010* that included my essay "The Great Books and Cultural Identity: The Rise and Fall of Western Memory and Its Implications for Our Time" that was a sustained defense of the great works of modern civilization, including the Great Books and its associated movement. In appreciation, Max sent me two of Mortimer Adler's books—*Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind* and *How to Read a Book: A Guide to Reading the Great Books*. He also mailed me a DVD of Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren engaged in a sustained series of conversations that distilled the essence of their coauthored edition of *How to Read a Book*. I still have and treasure the books and the video. Max designated me an honorary member of the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas and added my name to his regular e-mail contact list.

More recently, Max wrote an endorsement for my book of literary criticism, *The Doubling: Those Influential Writers That Shape Our Contemporary Perceptions of Identity and Consciousness in the New Millennium*, in which Dr. Shaughnessy and I discuss pairs of writers and, by implication, their ties to Western civilization.

Here's what Max wrote.

I highly recommend *The Doubling*, a series of literary interviews with Diana Sheets with questions posed by Michael F. Shaughnessy. It's an edifying enhancement of *The Great Conversation* exemplified in the Hutchins/Adler *Great Books of the Western World*. *The Doubling* facilitates

our educational understanding of great literature and enriches our appreciation of the humanities.

**Max Weismann, Cofounder with Mortimer Adler
Center for the Study of The Great Ideas in Chicago**

Three chapters of *The Doubling* appeared late in 2016 in a special edition of one of the Center's weekly journals. I subsequently mailed Max two copies of my book, one of which was personally inscribed to him.

Hopefully, my comments explain the context that shaped our relationship. However, it's Max I really wish to write about. He was a man deeply committed to the nurturance of our youth and to "keeping the culture" alive.

Thus, in an era in which the most important contributions to Western civilization have been nearly discarded, Max was actively engaged in perpetuating the educational foundations of Hutchins and Adler's contributions. As President and co-founder with Mortimer Adler of the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas, Max Weismann rekindled interest in Adler's wisdom and writings. He distributed contributions by other distinguished authors that had ties with the Great Books. One notable example was Jacques Barzun, who almost singlehandedly kept the Great Books culture alive at Columbia University where I received my Ph.D. in history.

Max was supportive and generous, passing along to me the name of a publisher who represents his work. Wherever he could help, he did. Why? Because, I believe, the importance of communicating knowledge was paramount to him. He had been very successful in industry, but he felt boundless gratitude toward Mortimer Adler who shared a deep affinity with Max about the intellectual and philosophy ideas that shaped Western civilization.

Sadly, I never met Max in person, but I felt I knew him. With his departure, I fear that we have reached a juncture in our society when the significant ideas that propelled Western civilization will no longer be understood and appreciated. These philosophic works must be studied and reinterpreted with each new generation to retain their significance. Our moral and cultural survival depends upon it.

I'm delighted that Max's widow, Elaine, is committed to keeping the Center alive. I hope that my cultural pessimism will prove unfounded.

I'll conclude with a toast to Max: "May your wisdom, your generosity, and your gift to humankind continue in perpetuity through the efforts of the Center, thereby keeping at bay the dark forces of ignorance."

To that end, I hope that the contributions made by Hutchins and Adler and Weismann will continue to foster an understanding and appreciation of the Great Books. I pray that this beacon of knowledge will be imparted to subsequent generations and, in so doing, grant them the courage, strength, and perseverance to sustain this wisdom in perpetuity.

*Dr. Diana Sheets is a Research Scholar at the University of Illinois. She writes literary criticism, political commentary, and fiction. Much of it can be read on her website, www.LiteraryGulag.com. Her latest book, *The Doubling: Those Influential Writers That Shape Our Contemporary Perceptions of Identity and Consciousness in the New Millennium*, is published by Nova Science Publishers.*

!Max Weismann

My first contact with Max was in 1999. I was trying to locate Mortimer Adler, and Max's Center for the Study of the Great Ideas was a link. Max was ill at that time, and graciously offered me his invitation to the annual Adler Reunion put on by the Aspen Institute for a small group of 25 or so of Adler's admirers. Appropriately, the group met as a Socratic seminar, round a very large circular table at the Aspen house in Wye, Maryland. Adler was in his element. So Max was instrumental in arranging that meeting, which led to the launching of the Great Books Academy, an online Great Books program for high schoolers and homeschoolers. Max didn't let it drop there - we remained in contact and Max became the first, and only, Chairman of the Great Books Academy, from 2000-2017. Max was always ready and willing-eager-to promote the study of the Great Books.

Again, in 2000, Max could not make what proved to be the final Adler Reunion, in San Mateo, CA, and again he generously offered me his invitation. I suppose I have well over 200 emails from Max

about various matters – he was always free with his time and suggestions- nearly all related in one way or another to his passion for the Great Books, or more accurately, for the Great Ideas contained in great books. One of many results was Adler’s last book, “The Great Ideas,” edited by Max.

It was such a delight to be in touch with someone so focused on the goods of the intellect and what is truly great therein, as both he and his dear friend Mortimer Adler were. Both were in pursuit of the highest ideas. Noble souls. Indeed, the very definition of “noble” is one with high ideals. Max actually lived out that ideal of nobility.

Patrick S.J. Carmack
President
Great Books Academy

In memory of Max Brent Scott

Upon thinking about relating how I knew Max Weismann and relating that to you what comes up for me is it's going to sound more about me than Max. However, ever since I became aware of Mortimer Adler, and later Max, both of these men, and many others more, have been woven into the fabric of my life and, from my point of view, my life is vastly richer for it.

I had been a fan for Dr. Adler since the mid 1980's when my intellectual life was expanded being exposed to Ettillie Wallace of Pacific Beach, San Diego, California. I sought out Ettillie doing research on Donal Hord, a local sculptor. I was training myself to become a sculptor having been exposed to wood carving by my maternal grandfather Allan Asbury O'Guinn, a survivor of the Battle of Wake Island and POW, having a civilian construction worker, a 41 year old father of five.

Having small children I became a proponent of Dr. Adler's Paidia Proposal and lobbied for it all the years my kids were in school. Adler's attitude toward life long learning was and continues to be an inspiration.

In 2004 I bought the Television series on DVD of the Great Ideas and wanted to develop a Study Guide and promote curriculum based on the 52 one half hour presentations Dr. Adler did and broadcast from San Francisco on what was the precursors to Public

Television. The segments were filmed (kinescope) and later transferred to DVD by Max and the Center (The Center for the Study of the Great Ideas). Max wasn't sure of the original sequence of broadcast of the series and I contacted the Public Television Archives and they found the sequence. I sent a copy of the report to Max for the Center and numbered the spine of my DVD copies.

This is where I begin my conversations with Max directly. Having corresponded by email about the series and the idea of developing a study guide I call Max, who always had time for me and was real and genuine. He encouraged me to write the study guide myself by not being formally educated myself I didn't think I was up for the task. I spent quite a bit of time trying to find someone who might be interested in taking this on but no dice.

In 2006 I signed up for a module at the Shambalha Institute. It was Adam Kahane's module Solving Tough Problems, given that year in Nova Scotia. I arranged to see two people on the way back from the conference had been following for years: Dr. Hector Sebelli (<http://www.eoht.info/m/page/Hector+Sabelli>), who I was introduced to through his book Personalization I picked up at the Peace Museum in Chicago and Max.

Max proposed we meet at the Pump Room. And from reading some stories relating to Max this was usual for him. I proceeded to thoroughly enjoy myself having many Black Russians until my speech was so slurred even I gave up trying to understand myself. I don't regret having spent my time with Max like this, it was how he wanted it, but writing this now, I regret not having stayed sober to really have a rich conversation with Max.

The last time I called Max just to check in in 2008, I called him from Second Mesa, the Hopi community in Arizona. I have Hopi friends, Morgan and Joyce Sufkie, and used to go up there fairly frequently to help out. A note of caution to all those who feel compelled to lend a hand to indigenous peoples: Read *The White Mans Burden* by William Easterly.

I was at the edge of second Mesa looking toward Mount Humphreys in Flagstaff Arizona. The Mesa rises directly out of the land. In this panorama several rain showers were occurring at different locations and the "Long Hairs" were plainly visible (from such a perspective the rain falling from singular clouds resembles long flowing hair falling to the ground).

Max was relating to me that he had just come out of treatments to

address several cancers. I was relating that with the collapse of 2008 I was completely wiped out and unemployed. You'd think on the face of the conversation that things might sound quite dismal, but far from it. Max's spirit seemed to be indomitable. He had the quality of relating that was genuine and friendly. Imaging, microscopic me having the audacity to call a giant like Max. It was not that way at all. You have to understand what having a relationship with a person of Max's stature and humanity was like for me. The contribution he made to my life was his willingness to dialog and his friendly manner. You see, I carried this friendship and humanity with me always, through some very tough times, and I always felt supported by it. I still do. This was the gift Max gave me. His friendship. His interest and support as a fellow passenger on Spaceship Earth. His commitment to Adler's principles of life long learning. All of that I carry with me and will to the end of my days. I am a richer man for having known you Max Weismann. I am forever in your debt.



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