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House of Representatives

On the Passing of Bill Handleman

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey

Mr. Speaker, award-winning journalist Bill Handleman, 62, of the Asbury Park Press, tragically passed away yesterday after a long bout with cancer.

A family man and a humanitarian with a great big heart and incisive wit, Bill is survived by his dear wife Judy, his three children, his mom, extended family, and a boatload of friends.

And allow me to extend our deepest condolences to the family and to let them know that our prayers are with them during this very, very difficult time.

Mr. Speaker, to know Bill Handleman in person or through his prolific pen is to respect and admire his innate goodness, his generosity, and good humor. For years, Bill's news beat was sports, and he especially liked the ponies. He was a four-time sportswriter of the year, in 1992, 2002, 2003, and 2005.

Asbury Park Press staff writer Shannon Mullen writes in today's edition,

however, that "Bill soon discovered that he much preferred writing about everyday struggles of ordinary people rather than the coddled multimillionaire athletes he dealt with on the sports beat."

Bill had an extraordinary penchant for a compelling subject matter and consistently turned the seemingly mundane, especially those who were left out and left behind, into compelling human interest stories.

The Press's Shannon Mullen again summed it up well: "Bill Handleman was a gifted storyteller. His writing style was direct, witty, and spare. A lifelong student of Hemingway, he used periods like an Impressionist painter uses a brush, preferring short, incisive sentences that packed a punch. And as a columnist, Handleman relished championing the underdog." Mr. Speaker, thank God he did.

Even as he battled cancer, Bill turned out one great story after another with intriguing titles like, "A Man With a Hole in His Heart: A Coach's Story"; "No Longer Homeless: A Former Mogul

Envisions the Future”; “A Different Midlife Crisis: A Man Learns that He Is Adopted”; “During the Depression, the Poor Scramble for Work and Cash”; “A Father Leaves Behind a Secret”—it was a World War II veteran story.

His stories made us laugh and touched our hearts, and they moved us to action, like the case of David Goldman. To a large extent, David Goldman ceased being invisible in his heroic battle to reclaim his son, Sean, from a child abductor in Brazil because Bill Handleman made it his passion to effectively inform, inspire, and challenge the community, including and especially lawmakers, to join David’s struggle for justice.

“For 4 years, no one could hear him. He was shouting in the dark,” David’s father, Barry, told Mr. Handleman in one column. In the 16 months since Mr. Handleman began telling this story, David’s seemingly intractable plight went from near total obscurity to huge prominence. Public officials at every level responded to the call.

Each of Bill Handleman’s approximately 24 columns not only conveyed to readers timely and critically important information about the Goldman case, but Mr. Handleman went deep behind the scenes to flesh out details of uncommon courage, sacrifice and compassion. Bill Handleman gave the community rare

insights into the raw emotion and the fleeting successes, followed by frustrating setbacks, the agony and ultimately the ecstasy of David and Sean’s permanent reunion.

In a candor and depth of reporting found nowhere else in the print media, we got to know David in his own words as he was thinking it. Readers of the column were there with David on countless trips to Rio, to Brasilia, to Washington, and at home with him in Monmouth County. For more than a year, Bill Handleman allowed us to see it all as David did and to walk, to some extent, in left-behind-parents’ shoes. Through Bill Handleman’s incisive pen, we also got to know much of David Goldman’s family and close friends.

We will miss Bill Handleman. I, along with tens of thousands of others, read each and every column, often with tears and empathy and resolve to do more about David Goldman’s case. David Goldman was, indeed, lucky that the columnist who embraced his quest turned out to be a consummate storyteller and the Handleman column a true game-changer. Bill Handleman did an exceptional job. We will miss him dearly.

Again, our prayers and our condolences go out to Judy and to the family.