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Remembering Papa Lyman

20 September 2005 — Lyman W. Newlin

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I have been trying to remember the circumstances under which I met Lyman Newlin, and I cannot. It is sufficient to say that he was part of the fabric of the library acquisitions, publishing and book-selling world. As a young librarian, I knew instinctively that he was an icon, a man full of history that he shared freely and someone who was held in high regard by many. He delighted in telling stories of the early days of book-selling, and as someone who loves and respects our history, I soaked it all up.

At some point, our professional relationship developed into a friendship. Maybe it was because of his roots in Illinois, where I live, or the fact that I was a Niagara Falls girl born and bred, and lived in Lewiston when I was young, where Lyman and his family resided. Maybe it was because, as he delighted to tell me, he liked blondes! “My wife is blonde, you know,” he would always say.

When my son Jacob was born, Lyman became his honorary grandfather. My own father had passed away and my feelings of family and friendship toward Lyman made him an instant choice in a role that he happily accepted. One day, a package arrived at our house, a present for baby Jacob. I had to laugh when I saw that Lyman had sent him a little “Lyman Suit,” with a white t-shirt, a vest and a tiny bowtie. Every time I see that outfit, I see Lyman and smile.

Over the years, Lyman kept me supplied with wild rice, and sent me Canadian goodies that I had grown up with, teas and jams and biscuits. He was the first person I would look for on the exhibit floor at ALA, following the reports of a “Lyman sighting” as he moved through the hall confessing with his many many friends. It wasn’t a good conference until I had caught up with him and given him a hug and an update on my family, and showed him pictures, or sometimes brought the boys with me.

I often wonder what Lyman thought about all the changes that we are facing, the shifts in our universe of libraries and publishing. Whatever he may have thought, the fundamental essence of Lyman and what he stood for transcends all of that: his honesty, commitment to ethical behavior, and his respect for others. He was a wonderful mentor to me and many others in the things that matter the most. I am grateful for the gift of traveling with him a distance in this life.

Dear Papa Lyman...Well done, Thou good and faithful servant. With love and respect,

Karen Schmidt & family

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