

## Remembering my Life with Peter Hare

John Corcoran

University of Buffalo

Peter H. Hare, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Buffalo (SUNY at Buffalo), died peacefully in his sleep on Thursday, January 3, 2008. I would like to share my memories of my life with him. Others have eulogized him, enumerated his virtues and accomplishments, and written his obituaries. I am revisiting my personal relationship with him. These memories are as much about me as about him.

### Our Last Evening Together

Although Peter and I had a frequent email correspondence up until a week or so before he died, our last face-to-face meeting took place almost two months earlier in Buffalo on November 12, 2007. It was the last of several raucous evenings the two of us shared over the more than 35 years of our friendship. It started with drinks in my dimly lit second floor study looking westward over a lovely Buffalo snowscape as the sunset faded. Peter had enjoyed that view many times before but never in the winter at sunset. He was in a wonderful mood. He roared with delight as I gave a dramatic reading of a humorous logic piece I had just finished writing. In return, he gave me his latest insights into his evolving interpretation of one of Gertrude Stein's poems, which he saw as extolling the aesthetics of symbolic logic. As I had done more than once before, I urged him to get it into print before he got scooped.

We were having so much fun that I forgot to show him what I had invited him to see, my new glass polyhedra. In the summer, I had proved the existence of a previously unknown three-dimensional geometrical figure, the subregular tetrahedron. I had commissioned a local glassmaker to construct two of them, mirror images that are congruent but do not coincide. After we were bundled up ready to leave the house, I remembered to show them to him. Peter loved them. His first impulse was to regard them as abstract sculptures. We did not have time to discuss them or even to review the mathematical definitions. If he had had more time to sit and study them, he would have

had a score of questions. And he would have told me what his favorite philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce said about solid geometry and what Peirce would have said about my discovery. The next day it annoyed me to realize that I had this missed opportunity. But I thought I would get another chance. It hurts much more now to realize that I never will.

After the sky had lost its color, we went out into the windy, freezing cold night for dinner at a nearby quiet Thai restaurant. We discussed his recent travels to Romania and his plans for future travel. We also discussed his love of sculpture, his education, his father, department news, my logic course, and the Buffalo Logic Colloquium, which had been dear to him for many years. I don't ever remember him in a better mood or in a better state of health.

He died in his sleep— a pulmonary embolism. Many years ago he told me in casual conversation that there was a history of heart problems in his family and that he did not expect to live past 60. He made it to 72.

#### Overview

Peter and I were very close over the years. He appointed me Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies in his first administration as Chair, 1971-75, in my second year at UB when I was an untenured associate professor. Without his unstinting support, my tenure and promotion to full professor would have been delayed and my assignments to positions in college, university, and SUNY-wide governance would not have occurred. In those days such positions carried prestige and salary increases which remained even after their terms expired. I have been clear about my debt to Peter for years and I am glad to say that I expressed my gratitude many times while he was alive. In 1995 I published a logic paper with the following epigraph: *Dedication: to Peter H. Hare for a quarter century of leadership, encouragement, and support of "The Buffalo School of Logic", with affection and admiration.* A year earlier there had been a reference in the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* to "The Buffalo School of Logic". Peter was so thrilled that his Department was getting this recognition that he had hundreds of lapel pins made. It was a three-inch white circle inscribed with blue italic script lettering "*The Buffalo School of Logic*". He got everyone he saw to wear one. I still have mine. Peter never missed an opportunity to make the Department feel good about itself.

We were on the same wavelength about many issues. Like me, he was a devoted feminist, civil rights advocate, civil liberties advocate, peace activist, environmentalist, and philosophical pluralist. He was deeply offended by partiality, bigotry, old-boyism, and injustice, even though his intense personal loyalties and his zeal for a righteous cause sometimes led him to do some fudging and corner-cutting that could look like unfairness to those on the losing side. I was always on the winning side. In a few cases, people were offended and things backfired.

As far as class differences are concerned, on the surface we could not have been more different. He was born into a wealthy and accomplished Protestant New York family with a distinguished history tracing back beyond the Revolutionary War. His mother is a direct descendant of Commodore Matthew Perry. An etching of the American fleet Perry commanded hung in Peter's Buffalo home. His father, a modernist architect, was a member of an aristocratic New York men's club, the Century Club. Peter went to boarding schools, to an exclusive prep school, and to an Ivy League college and graduate school. In my family, it was pretty much the opposite. All eight siblings in my lower economic-class Catholic family went to public or tuition-free parochial schools. We lived in a semi-rural, three-bedroom, one-bath house: four girls in one bedroom, four boys in another and the parents in the third. My twin brother and I were the first two in the history of the family to earn college degrees; we both went on to the PhD: he at MIT, I at Johns Hopkins.

Over the years Peter made many sometimes overtly proud references to his privileged past, but I never gave him the slightest clue about my underprivileged one. He never pressed me about my background. When he seemed to be interested I would brag about my advanced science-mathematics high school (the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute) and about my two brothers who graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. Commodore Perry had taken special interest in the Naval Academy and Peter's family history included some graduates of the US Military Academy at West Point.

The previous paragraphs reflect the impression that Peter allowed people to form and that he seemed to encourage without actually stating. After he died I found out from his widow, the celebrated poet Susan Howe, that the reality was somewhat different. The

fact is that his father did not pursue an architectural career for long. He became an eccentric modernist. Despite some impressive commissions, including the well-known Theatre Complex at the University of Wisconsin and US consulates in Latin America, he could not sustain his profession. His business failed, and he turned to a cultish philosophical group in England and ran through the family money, including the inheritance. Peter went to Groton and Yale on scholarships and to Columbia on fellowships. Members of his family had been at Groton and Yale in better times. It was an embarrassment to him to be on financial aid. He had almost no help from his family during those years. Peter worked jobs at all these schools to pay for room and board. So Peter's educational years were more like mine than I ever would have imagined.

Although Peter was not a logician, he knew and appreciated my work in history and philosophy of logic. We discussed my philosophy of logic, and he encouraged me in it. His knowledge of symbolic logic was that of the typical philosophy PhD. He knew *of* my mathematical work. He respected it without really seeing where it fit in and without understanding any details. Philosophy, history, linguistics, and mathematics are all equally important parts of my intellectual work. Although Peter had a feeling that all four were essential to my perspective, he only knew the first two parts.

But he enthusiastically supported all my projects: the Ancient Logic conference, the Tarski conference, the Church Symposium, the Buffalo Logic Colloquium, the Buffalo Logic Dictionary Project, etc. In the 25 years before his retirement Peter attended most of my numerous colloquium presentations and many meetings of the Buffalo Logic Colloquium, even when the speaker was not one of our faculty members. And he would regularly attend the always lively, sometimes rowdy, beer-fueled dinners held afterward in an inexpensive working-class restaurant near campus, where tradition was for the faculty members to split the modest bill and for the graduate students to pay nothing.

I owe Peter more than I can say. I will miss his enthusiastic and imaginative support. I will miss the attention he paid to my ideas, his thoughtful and objective criticisms, and his enthusiastic encouragement. And I will miss his warm friendship. And most of all, I will miss our times together. He was fun to be around. When Peter was present, there was never a lull in the conversation.

## Our First Meeting

I met Peter in the winter of 1968-69 on a cold, damp, gray day. I gave a talk “Conceptual Structure of Classical Logic” at the interim campus of the University of Buffalo. The old campus was overcrowded and the new campus was just being built. I was in the last year of a four-year appointment as Assistant Professor of Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. As a candidate for an untenured associate professorship, I was interviewed by the Chair and the Associate Chair before the talk. The Chair was William Parry, a distinguished logician who was nationally known and respected for having stood up to Senator McCarthy and HUAC; the Associate Chair was Peter Hare. Peter was a tenured associate professor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

I remember the talk, the lively discussion that followed, and many other things about that day. I have vivid memories of many of the people at the talk and the dinner that followed – Charles Pailthorp, Newton Garver, Mary Varney, Thomas Perry, Richard Hull, Kenneth Barber, Jesse Kalin, and the logicians Nicolas Goodman, Robert Martin, John Pollock, Lynn Rose, Charles Lambros, William Parry, and John Kearns. The dinner was attended largely, perhaps exclusively, by a large number of untenured assistant professors, instructors, and graduate students. At the dinner I learned that the large 36 member Philosophy Department had a two-tier social structure. At the top were the full professors and tenured associate professors. At the bottom were the rest. The top group, to which Peter belonged, included such well-known figures as Marvin Farber, Rollo Handy, Edward Madden, Paul Kurtz, and John Anton.

But aside from his warmth to me and his exalted status, I do not remember much about Peter on that visit. I started teaching at UB in the fall of 1970. I got to know Peter well during that year. He looked the part of the established East-coast academic: tweed sport coat, button-down shirt, bow tie, and long sideburns known as mutton chops. My style was more bohemian: jeans, turtlenecks, thick red beard, long flowing red hair, despite some thinning on the top. My winter hat was a wool US Navy watch cap that Peter found amusing. He often referred to it as a toque, using a word I had never heard before. He was the post-preppie, I the post-hippie.

I remember looking at his CV and being impressed with the number of his publications in prestigious journals. He had published over 20 articles against my three. I

looked up to him because of his status and his achievements. If someone had told me that he was less than two years older than I (which he was), I would not have believed it.

### The Years of the Hare-Corcoran Administration

In 1971 Peter became Chair of the Philosophy Department. I was surprised and flattered when he appointed me Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies, a post in which I served during the rest of his first four-year term. I inferred that he would never have appointed me if he had any doubts I'd get tenure. In two years I went from being unemployed to being virtually guaranteed tenure at one of the country's best philosophy departments. My most vivid memories of Peter date to this period. He became a mentor to me. From then until the time of his death, without ever saying so even to myself, I regarded him in some vague way as my superior, somewhat like an older brother or an uncle. I sought his advice often. But it was only after he died that I came to realize how strongly I valued his opinions and wanted his approval.

In 1973, the chairs and associate chairs of the four SUNY graduate philosophy departments (Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook) were to meet for a weekend in Albany to discuss ways of increasing cooperation and communication. I suggested to Peter that we propose broadening the agenda to include presentations of recent research results achieved in the four departments. I volunteered to present my recent interpretation of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* as a natural deduction system. After Peter forwarded my proposal to the other three departments and to SUNY Central Administration, it was immediately accepted, but it was modified so that there would be only one full-length lecture and then four 15-minute presentations by each of the four chairs, summarizing the research in their respective departments. I was invited to give the full-length presentation. Peter was proud to show off his department's achievements.

It must have been on a short winter day that the conference started. I remember the four or five hour drive partly in the dark with Peter at the wheel of an official car bearing the insignia the State of New York. We had a lively conversation and the time seemed short. We made a rest stop at a Howard Johnson on the Thruway and decided to get a snack because it would be some hours before we would be able to have dinner. I decided to have a bowl of chili, still my favorite snack, even before getting out of the car.

I insisted that Peter order first. I remember being amazed and delighted that he ordered a bowl of chili.

### Philosophical Exchanges

Over the years Peter and I had many lively and informative philosophical exchanges. American Philosophy had been on my back burner for years before arriving at UB. As a graduate student I had studied Peirce, James, and Whitehead with Victor Lowe at Hopkins; as a Visiting Associate Professor, I sat in on Abraham Kaplan's American Philosophy seminar at Michigan in 1969-1970. And of course, as a logician, I had studied Quine and Lewis intensely. Quine is my doctor grandfather; Lewis my doctor great grandfather.

From the beginning I did not like the tone of American Philosophy. The more I learned about it, the better I was able to articulate what I found distasteful about it. Nevertheless, I am still fascinated with American Philosophy, and I respect its problems, intricacies, and attractions. Frankly, pragmatism and American-style naturalism are not agreeable to my temperament. Cognitivism and realism suit me better. The key difference between cognitivism and pragmatism – though Peter would always object to my putting it this way – is that for the cognitivist the end of inquiry is knowledge of truth, but for the pragmatist the end of inquiry is belief. For the pragmatist, not only is there no such thing as knowledge in the traditional strict sense, but there is no such thing as truth either, in the sense of correspondence with reality.

I can go along with American-style naturalism's support of humanism and its opposition to the supernatural. But like Peter, I am intellectually repulsed by its scientific tendencies and its recent shrill disrespect of religion. Even though neither Peter nor I have religious beliefs in any traditional sense, we both felt strongly the pluralistic impulse to respect all sincere belief as long as it left room for non-believers. I playfully told Peter that I am a naturalist – adding that, after all, to a Platonist, abstract objects are as much part of the natural world as concrete objects. On several occasions he tried to get me to admit that the pursuit of truth is not a privileged value, that it is a Jamesian choice just like the pursuit of justice, or pleasure, or power. Once I said to him: "OK, Peter, I have faith in reason, but I can't remember *choosing* to believe in reason." In all of our

exchanges, sharp differences came to light, but no sharp word ever passed between us – it wasn't Peter's way. I could have handled a certain amount of heat in exchanges without being disturbed, but I was always on my best dialectical behavior with Peter. He was the best conversationalist I ever knew: always intense, always focused, but always respectful and polite. He had a beneficial effect on everyone he conversed with.

As many readers already know, I solicit comments and criticisms on drafts before submitting them for publication. I think that learning is a social process carried out by a community of scholars. Peter and I agreed on this. He thought he got it from Peirce. I got it from study groups with my brilliant high-school friends at the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. Later I realized that Plato thought so to, as evidenced by the dialogue form he chose for his writings. Over the years Peter remarked several times that I had taken this collaborative method more seriously and with more energy than anyone he knew. He was afraid that someone might steal my ideas before I got them into print. I told him I was more afraid of missing the opportunity to be corrected, and thus going into print with a flawed work. Besides, I get deep satisfaction from engaging in dialogue.

Once I started using email, I would send Peter drafts of everything historical or philosophical I wrote, and he would critique it as a rigorous and meticulous but sympathetic editor and as a promoter of American Philosophy. He would always make sure that my treatment of American philosophers and logicians put them in the best light consistent with the textual evidence. In late fall 2003, before I left Buffalo to spend the winter in Florida, Peter put in my department mailbox a huge package that turned out to be the typescript of Murray Murphey's then forthcoming intellectual biography of C. I. Lewis. Peter wanted me to write an article about Murphey's treatment of Lewis's logic for a special issue of the *Transactions*. I started working on it as soon as I got to Florida. When Peter got the first draft by email, he replied in a day or so with a list of detailed criticisms and suggestions, ending with a comment to the effect that the draft was too much Corcoran and too little Lewis and Murphey. It took several drafts before I had something he was happy with. He never said a word about the order of the articles in the journal. I was gratified when I saw that he made mine the lead article making it the first in the 2006 volume. It appeared as "C. I. Lewis: History and Philosophy of Logic", *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society*. 42 (2006) 1-9.



After the Lewis piece was finished, he read and commented on draft after draft of nine articles I wrote that were commissioned by John Lachs and Robert Talisse for the 2007 Routledge *Encyclopedia of American Philosophy*. Not only did Peter critique my drafts, but he also dug up passages I needed to cite and gave me names and email addresses of several scholars who could help. Although I have had a cordial relationship with John Lachs for many years, I suspect Peter had some involvement in my being offered the nine commissions. I am not thought of as a specialist in American Philosophy. Before the *Transactions* paper, I had never been invited to participate in an American Philosophy project. Without Peter, none of those 10 articles would exist. And even if similar opportunities were to present themselves in the future, without Peter I could never write them as accurately or with as much fairness to American Philosophy.

Although we discussed the *Encyclopedia of American Philosophy* in scores if not hundreds of emails, Peter never mentioned the honor that the editors had accorded him: he was chosen among a dozen or so renowned philosophers to contribute an autobiographical article on his own philosophical development. Peter's bragging was mostly about the achievements of his colleague and students.

Peter made no secret of the fact that he enjoyed reading my philosophical work. He told me this many times – in fact the last time I saw him he went into some detail about his enjoyment of the writing itself, how he would savor each sentence. As far as I know, only four other people have enjoyed my philosophical prose as much. Of the five, three are dead. In every case, I felt diminished as a person by the death. It was as if part of me had died.

#### Dinners in the Garden

In early August 1995, when I was away from Buffalo, Peter's first wife Prof. Daphne Hare, a physician, died after a long struggle with melanoma. My wife Lynn and I had been guests of the Hares. Although they had been to parties at our house on Burbank Terrace in the small Buffalo neighborhood known as Tinytown, they had never been dinner guests of ours – in spite of our best intentions. After Daphne died, we invited Peter for drinks and dinner in our garden. He had not seen Lynn's two-story-high, flowering trumpet vine bedecked with hundreds of deep orange-red "trumpets" and regularly visited

by a pair of Baltimore orioles. As luck would have it, the trumpet vine was one of Peter's favorite plants, as it is one of mine. In fact, Peter had been trying to grow one himself, but he had not achieved the success that Lynn had. From then on, Peter would recall from time to time the delightful evening outdoors, dining with a view of the trumpet vine. We repeated the event four or five more times before Peter's death. His last dinner in the garden was in the early fall 2006 when he was accompanied by his wonderful new wife, the poet Susan Howe. Lynn and I were cheered to see how happy Peter and Susan were that evening, and how complementary their personalities were. They seemed on track for a long and happy life together.

#### Afterword

There is more information about me and less about Peter in this remembrance than I would like. I can imagine Peter reading it over and saying: "John, it's a nice first draft, but there is too much Corcoran and not enough Hare". I considered making deletions and additions but finally concluded that memories are less misleading if the person doing the remembering is better known. Forgive me if I am wrong.

After this memoir was written, I learned that after his retirement Peter bought a US Navy watch cap which he wore on frequent winter walks in the Connecticut countryside.

#### Acknowledgements

For criticisms and suggestions I would like thank Robert Barnes, Millard Beatty, Stephen Brown, Joseph Corcoran, Lynn Corcoran, William Corcoran, John Foran, Margaret Corcoran Glenn, Carol Gould, Forest Hansen, Roger Hurlbert, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Timothy Madigan, Daniel Merrill, Irvin Miller, Joaquin Miller, Mary Corcoran Morton, Mary Mulhern, José Miguel Sagüillo, and Judith Wagner. Special thanks to four special people. Forest Hansen, my dear friend for over fifty years, has continued to be my grammatical and editorial conscience. Stephen Brown and Lynn Corcoran revealed things about my relationship with Peter that I might never have noticed. I am also deeply grateful to Susan Howe for crucial information and for her enthusiastic encouragement.

An adaptation of this memoir appears as part of an article “Remembering Peter Hare 1935-2008”: *Philosophy Now*, Issue 66 March/April 2008, pages 50-2, co-authors: T. Madigan and A. Razin.