

OBITUARY: Frank S. Zepezauer

Sept. 2, 1928 – June 3, 2017

I just heard news of ... well, what to call it? People want to use a euphemism: "Something happened," or, "He passed," or, "He passed away," or, "He met his fate," or, "He achieved mortality." These words take refuge in vagueness. My own penchant is to be direct: Frank Zepezauer died June 3, 2017, on a Saturday. He was surrounded by family, which I know was a comfort to him, and he received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction—also known as "Last Rites," "Holy Oils," and by other phraseology too, e.g., it is often referred to simply as "Anointing of the Sick" or (in this case) "Blessing of the Sick" when the other two Sacraments: Penance and Viaticum (Confession and Communion), are not administered to the dying person. Frank had often discussed with me the importance of receiving this Sacrament when he died, and had even asked that if his death were approaching, I would do what I could to make sure he received the Last Sacrament. Well; I didn't

know the time was approaching, so I did nothing to make sure he received this final blessing, so I am especially glad he received this anointing without my help.

I never met Frank, but we began writing letters in early 1982, and sometimes we exchanged verbal letters by cassette tape. Occasionally we talked by phone. But mainly we corresponded, and while there have been many people I have corresponded with in my life, my letters to Frank had a unique value. I enjoyed writing him more than anyone else I corresponded with. My words came out easily, and I do not boast in stating that somehow he evoked the best from me in my writing. I look at copies of those letters and at times am even impressed at myself when I read the words I sent him.

So this correspondence spanned more than a third of a century. That is a long time for getting to know someone, and there were many things I came to know about Frank's life. I need not reiterate the details here since I am sure he shared them with many people. But there were things about his personality which, if other people espied them too, nevertheless bear repeating if only for the sake of emphasis.

One thing about Frank that deserves special note is how he wore his faults on the outside. This assertion warrants explanation. I mean that he was quite different from most of us who camouflage our faults, try to conceal them, and pretend to others that they don't exist. Frank did not bother with such camouflage. He revealed to others his shortcomings and faults. This might not have kept him from excusing those faults, or defending them, or even trying to impose their effects on others. But he was candid about them, always willing to recognize at least some degree of fallibility in what he believed, and so one could dialogue with him about the ways he was imperfect. (As all of us are imperfect.)

This first observation about Frank naturally leads to a second one, which I believe most people are quite aware of. He was one of those people who constantly made of himself a better person throughout his entire life. He became a better husband, father, grandfather, and friend. He worked at all these roles. He also became a better writer, scholar, and student of life. I think Frank began young adulthood possessing little in the way of self-esteem, but as he proceeded through

life, even if he never reached a state of abiding equanimity, he did achieve a balance of resignation and serenity which served him well and blessed those around him.

A third note about Frank, which is an inspiration for me, is how he always remained an avid student. Even during the last three years of his life he entered upon new excursions in pre-human paleontology, ancient Greek and Roman history, and always politics. Most people, it seems, attain a level of knowledge and then as the weariness and infirmities of old age come upon them, in tandem with the luxury of entrenched opinions, they are content with who they are and what they know. But Frank's curiosity remained keen, his sharp mind active, and he always continued delving—learning more just for the sake of learning. Frank Zepezauer was the paradigmatic autodidact right up to the end.

Having been a companion with Frank in his writing, having edited and published some of his works, I came to know certain facets of his personality through his writing which I suspect not many people espied. For one thing, while Frank could be dogmatic in conversation, he was chronically humble in his writing. When he put

an opinion to paper, it seemed he did not want to pontificate.

Also he had a command of what is beautiful in language and was willing to share the fruits of his creative labors. After his alarming illness in summer of 2004, he subsequently sent me a lovely poem he had written for his wife Joan ten years earlier. It proceeds thus:

Carpe Diem Redux

*We saw the cypress together once more,
The sea lions, the otters dining off
Their bellies, and mute within the surf's roar
Pelicans, crooked cones stretched out aloft.
Our spirits lightened, old couple at play,
And you found a girl's voice to tell the sight
Of mule deer munching ice plants. Then we stayed
Long hours to watch, careless of coming night.
At twilight chill dark clouds pushed down the sun.
A squashed ball now touched the ocean's gray rim
And sea and sky and granite rock were one
Dying red. Then, next moment, all went dim.*

*A potent sign for you and me who see
Far more days behind than days ahead?
I felt instead a deep relief to know that we
Had lived a day that might have wakened dread.
We seized the day by letting it go
When thought, not time, was our deadliest foe.*

**September, 1994
Frank S. Zepezauer**

I was very struck by this poem. It evinced humility, it expressed wonder and love, and it also cradled wisdom about what old age both portends and promises. In fact, I suggested to Frank that he edit an anthology of love poems written by old people, and include in that anthology this poem and perhaps others he might write. But he wasn't much interested. He had written a poem, but he did not consider himself a poet. He suggested I do it instead. I declined on the grounds that I didn't think I could find much poetry that would involve old people expressing love, and also I wasn't sure there would be an audience for such poetry.

The truth is, I think both of us steered away from this topic for the simple reason that when you are young enough to still have the energy for writing

poetry about being old, much of your attention is turned to the art of living. The art of poetry can wait—even languish. As beautiful as poetry about old people can be, isn't it better to live through the process of growing old and find beauty in living that part of life well?

This was Frank Zepezauer. He went through struggles, he often stumbled, but he always had a sense of humor along with unflagging energy. The result was that he found beauty in the highest of all arts, namely, the art of living. We were blessed by what he achieved in this realm, and that blessing is and remains an inspiration.

May he now
rest in peace.

(By Francis Baumli;
written June 5, 2017.)

(Posted June 15, 2017.)

(This obituary belongs in the Men's Liberation section herein because Frank Zepezauer was an ardent men's liberation activist. His focus was on fathers' rights, from what he termed a neo-conservative vantage point, but his range of interest was quite general. He published on men's issues in many periodicals, not a few of them religious journals or magazines, and he also published in the well-known men's liberation publications. He was a regular contributor to The Liberator for many years, and in my role as editor I published him in Transitions, and also in my book Men Freeing Men.)