

FORWARD

[Cleverly masqueraded as “A Note to the Publisher-To-Be”]

Dear Publisher,

Thank you for considering publishing Mr. Rechtman’s book of poetry. I thought some pertinent biographical information might be useful for your assessment. My qualifications? I helped him edit and organize the book, and I am his son. Other than that, I can give you my absolute assurance of abject objectivity.

Three years ago, in conversation with my father, I discovered what he and most others never recognized: his passion. He had been in the shmatta industry (that’s Yiddish for making garments, which is English for clothes) for 19 years, and had then progressed to the health foods retailing industry for five years, then regressed to the ornamental metal industry (that’s Latin for burglar bars and iron security doors) for three years, regressed some more to be a consultant for failing industries, and finally regressed completely and went to work for the U.S. government. It is in that capacity that he has found his consistent labor niche for quite a few years now. But none of this touched his passion.

As I was growing up and gradually becoming a mature musician (it took me only 47 years), he was always there to encourage me. But up until my early 20s, his encouragement was more in the direction of a “Rechtman and Son” arrangement: I was groomed (under not always a quiet protest) to be a salesperson, a factory manager, a rabbi (the only thing I remember in Hebrew is what I heard most often; translated, it means “Shut up, children!”), and a dilettante with little or no respect for the Truth. I succeeded equally in all but the last of these endeavors: I failed. He seemed to always see the dark side of any idea I proffered; this is related to a cultural vendetta based upon the “evil eye:” If you say something nice about someone to their face, you will bring them bad luck. So my father was always quick to show how much he liked me by showing me how all my ideas were doomed to failure, including pointing out how great it would be if I could be enrapt in music and performance, as long as I did not do it with the expectation of earning a living from it.

One theme throughout our relationship was that I should set one of his story ideas to music as an opera: his story based upon his sewing factory experience. It would be vaguely reminiscent of “The Pajama Game” musical, replete with love, plot twists, and music but all combined in such a way that it would inevitably be guaranteed a run of one day or less. Until the revelation of three years ago, I had always assumed this was just another encouragement in the direction of “Rechtman and Son.”

Not so.

When Mel was in high school, he was involved in radical sports, radical politics, and radical theater. He was very introspective, creative, and lazy, and intelligent enough to utilize his introspection to creatively manufacture viable answers based upon interpolation of what he already knew rather than doing the

work of finding the real truths. (To his credit, he has long since evolved a deep, almost fanatical respect for Truth.)

In the tenth grade, his father had an accident, so Mel was forced to leave school and his education and go to work in his father's sewing factory, where they made cheap hats and caps. Feeling that his intellectual and creative developments were being stifled, he adapted his drives to the sewing industry with amazing plasticity: when you sell garments, you must know all the answers even if you don't; if you buy fabric, you must sound convincing that you know what the market really is per skein even if you don't. If school was heaven to him, this wasn't hell; it was merely a purgatory.

During all his years after his premature induction into the world of labor, he read vociferously, fearful that people would otherwise uncover the truth of his incomplete education. His acquisition of vast pools of otherwise useless knowledge subsequently empowered him to teach high school chemistry, college level modern business practices, and ultimately work professionally at a job that ordinarily would require a J.D. or better.

During that time, and in fact during his entire life, he also wrote. He wrote letters to the various editors of various journals, he wrote synopses, theorems, plots, scenes, short stories, and he wrote poems. Lots of poems.

So his passion? Hidden within all of that writing, his encouragement of my pursuit of the arts (as long as I didn't try to get rich off of it), his bluffing his way into business and educational institutions and publication in prominent scientific journals, is the passion of Theater. What his whole life has been about is writing and directing plays and musicals!

For him, at the age of 89, that possibility quietly fades. But it still manifests powerfully in the drama of his poetry, and if you read his poetry as drama, like all good poetry, it truly comes to life, and emanates all you would expect from grease paint, lights, camera and action.

Mel is an acronym. No, I mean he is an anachronism. Well, he also is an acronym: "Many Elements of Life." OK, so Mel is not a *great* acronym. And yes, he is an anachronism. But is that such a bad thing? He still reads other anachronisms such as Socrates and Plato, Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Shakespeare, and many other of his favorite authors that have helped guide and shape his life. He still ponders Fermat's mathematical theorems, ponders quantum questions, and delves in the essence of entropy as a living philosophy. Relatively speaking all of this is ancient: ask elementary school students how to wind a watch, or season a cast iron pan. The looks they will give you quickly convinces the essentialness of anachronistic perspectives. That is why I also occasionally read Socrates, Swift, Twain, and ponder how to trisect an angle with only a straight edge and compass, and why I occasionally read my father's poems. He may be an anachronism, but he is a *very good* anachronism.

Please publish his book, if not for him, for me. If not for me, for you. Then maybe you'll finally get to learn how to wind a watch.

Thank you,

Don Rechtman
Classical Composer and music teacher,
Shenzhen, Guandong China
April 25, 2011

Untimely Postscript

Mel, ever intent on serving humanity in death as in life, at the age of 91 kindly conceded his body to the Emory University School of Medicine on November 19, 2013. His “Family Placed Death Notice” composed primarily by his eldest daughter was placed in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Nov. 24, 2013, and reads in its entirety:

RECHTMAN, Melvin – The lovebirds have left the nest. BeMel is back in business. Melvin Rechtman (a.k.a., Dad, Grandpa-, Uncle-, and just-plain- Mel, or The Maven) died of complications of a heart attack on Tuesday November 19, 2013 at the age of 91. Some say he died of a broken heart, six months and five days after his beloved wife Bettie passed away. Under their eponymous brand BeMel, the couple owned and operated a wide range of businesses over the 68 years of their marriage, including Camp Hill (Ala.) Industries, West Point (GA) Manufacturing, Atlanta Nutrition Center, Nutrition Naturally, Iron Art, and Profit Engineering. An autodidact who quit school in the 9th grade, Mel was an accomplished poet and philosopher, whose work included correspondence in American Scholar. At his death, he was rereading Will Durant's History of Philosophy, readying a collection of his poems for publication, and developing a screenplay that re-imagined the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and his arch enemy Dr. Moriarty in the form of Irene Adler's illegitimate child. Mel is survived by his children and their partners: Janet Rechtman and Doug Aiken; Don Rechtman and Helen Shing; Linda and Marty Wolf; and Marte Fallshore and Dale Brubaker. His grandchildren and their spouses include Sara Wolf Mixon and husband Donn Aaron, Lesley Wolf and Kris Glodoski, Courtney Aiken and Brian Spina, and Brett and Carrie Aiken. In addition, Mitchell, Devon, Avery, Seth and Gehrig (his great grandchildren) had the chance to know Grandpa Mel. The family wants to thank Mel's brother, Leon Rechtman, his niece Sallie Friedman, and his care-sharer, Sharon Jones for their kind attentions during the last months of Mel's life. Those wishing to celebrate Mel Rechtman's life may make contributions to the Avis Williams' Library of the DeKalb Library System, where the family has established a collection of science books for children and youth.”