

An Appreciation, A Final Word

Everett Ladd is gone, and there's a big empty space where his office used to be.

Yeah, I know—the space was emptied prior to his untimely death in December, on the occasion of his equally untimely retirement from the directorship of the Roper Center in May. But even after he left, it was easier to picture the place as inhabited, as long as Everett was still in the world.

Lots of people have been saying and writing lots of things about Everett since his passing. Mostly, they talk about the twenty books he wrote, the countless articles, his twenty-two-year leadership of the Roper Center, the brilliant, incisive, analytical mind. I saw all these things in the three short years I was privileged to work for him and was awed by them; but I saw other things, too.

I saw a man who could inspire others to accomplishment far beyond anything they'd ever aspired to, just by setting an example and imposing exacting expectations for what he wanted to have done—no ifs, ands, or buts.

I saw a teacher whose students liked, admired, and continued to visit him long after he wasn't grading them anymore.

I saw a keen wit who was as capable of skewering politicians with wicked verve as he was of telling a staff member, "I have never once thought of you as a minion, whatever that is."

I saw a friend I wanted to keep in my life a great deal longer.

Everett wasn't perfect, not by a long stretch. He had his idiosyncrasies and his faults, and he had his share of detractors. Even those who looked up to and cared about him most became almost frantic with frustration in some of their dealings with him. In short, he was human. Who isn't? But even on his worst days, he could turn around with a sudden smile, a flash of humor, an expression of personal concern, and stick himself right back into your heart again. He was special that way.

In my mind's eye, the office where Everett Ladd said and did and was these things still has books lining the walls. Stacks of polling data litter every surface, and dozens of works of art by his grandchildren cover the door. In my mind's eye, his many awards still sit on the shelves, his bicycle stands in the corner, and the television is tuned to CNN.

But the Cornell University chair he always sat in is empty, and the lights are out.

He's gone for good, and I miss him a lot.

*—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee
The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research*