

JACK LEVINE '64

Jack Levine died on Friday, November 9, 2006. His courage, integrity, and grace are clear from two tributes below, one from his obituary that appeared in The Philadelphia Inquirer, the second a eulogy by our classmate, Rabbi Peter Rubinstein:

Jack J. Levine, an activist lawyer who gave advice on how to fight grand jury abuses to defendants ranging from activist nuns to US Vice President Spiro Agnew, died in New York at the age of sixty-four. The cause of death was salivary gland cancer. Born Jack John Levine on May 22, 1942, in Philadelphia, he was graduated from Amherst College and the Columbia Univ. School of Law and studied at Cambridge Univ.'s Institute of Criminology.

Levine in 1967 founded a group called Philadelphians for Equal Justice. They fought hard in court against legal abuses committed by Frank L. Rizzo, police commissioner and later mayor, as well as teenagers beaten while awaiting trial in a holding pen for juvenile defendants awaiting trial. On the national stage, Levine's clients included Vietnam Veterans against the War and associates of priest Philip Berrigan. Levine appeared in 1972 before the US Supreme Court as lead counsel for a Roman Catholic nun charged with contempt for refusing to testify before a grand jury about Berrigan's alleged plot to kidnap Henry Kissinger.

The defense was so successful that the following year lawyers for Spiro T. Agnew were reported to have telephoned Levine for advice on how he could fight off a grand jury probe. Levine, who usually worked pro bono, sent Agnew's defense team an invoice for \$50 with a note that he intended to donate the money to a fund for the impeachment of President Richard Nixon. Levine moved to New York in 1982 to pursue interests in photography, writing, and filmmaking. The theme of helping the underclass that inspired his legal career ran through his photography. On his photograph of children dancing on a street in Nicaragua, Levine inscribed anarchist Emma Goldman's words, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." Diagnosed with cancer more than a decade ago, Levine continued to practice law up until this summer. He is survived by his wife, filmmaker Molly Fowler, and their daughters, Macklin Clare Levine, ten, and Carson Grace Levine, seven. He also has a surviving twin sister, Jill Rosen of New York City.

Rabbi Rubinstein's eulogy reflects the same passions and values in Jack's life:

The writer of Ecclesiastes was correct in observing, "to everything there is a season and time to every purpose under the heavens," and most poignantly, "a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted."

But Jack would never cower to inevitability. He would have nothing of common wisdom, and he would dance to no other melody but his own. Even in the journey which led to his death, Jack neither believed in the certainty of it, nor did he accept that illness would fracture his spirit or compromise his soul.

Photos of Jack at Amherst portrayed an intense and good-looking red-haired man with laser sharp focus. He demonstrated his intellect and concentration in the classroom and on the athletic fields, on the pages of the newspaper and yearbook, and in his fraternal and personal allegiances.

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Jack's decency and integrity were not sufficiently honored at Amherst when we were jockeying for popularity and acceptance. That's not to say that he lacked the deep respect of his classmates in those years. We knew him for his athletic prowess: three varsity letters each for soccer and tennis and two for squash. He was a captain of the soccer and tennis teams, the latter as a junior. As a senior, unknown to anyone (including himself), he played a good part of the soccer season with mononucleosis. He would never accede to any power other than the strength of his own will. He would not surrender to illness as long as he had the breath to fight.

Jack lived with pure purpose and with the divine inclination to help those in need. His strength of character was never compromised. Even in these last months when his body was invaded by needles and tubes, he never broke stride: not his spirit, not his soul, not his hope, not his friendship. And certainly not his love: for his wife Molly and for his cherished daughters whose photos graced the walls of every room and who brought him joy and fulfillment.

On his last day Jack said, "I've made peace with my life, I've made peace with my wife and children and friends. I've made peace with myself. I'm just not at peace with my body. Please help me with that." They made him comfortable in the end, and for that he was grateful.

Jack made a difference in our lives. For that I thank God.

—David Stringer '64

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