

Denis Collins – Tribute

by Jim Weber, Duquesne University

Many of us have remembrances of, and stories about, our interactions with Denis Collins, he was that kind of person. He would come into your life and leave a positive mark, causing you to ponder, smile, maybe laugh, but always feel a new sense of passion for things that were important to you. That was Denis Collins for me.

I first met Denis when he started the University of Pittsburgh's doctoral program, I was in my third year there. I am amazed with his confidence and drive. At that time I had finished comprehensive exams and was struggling to find a suitable dissertation topic. Denis came to Pittsburgh with his dissertation topic AND his dissertation data in hand based on his master's degree work at Bowling Green University! This may be why he finished the program a year quicker than I did.

Thankfully we reunited again in Wisconsin. Denis provided me with a teaching model that I was never quite capable of duplicating but motivated me to always strive to bring the same passion into my classroom. At the core of his model was to set challenges before his students to make their lives better and the lives of those they touched. Denis created student projects that slowly but surely impacted the Madison landscape, especially among the non-profit organizations in town. Denis also led a series of business ethics roundtables and business leaders often remarked how rewarding this experience was for them personally.

Throughout our many decades as friends, I would look forward to seeing Denis at Academy of Management meetings. It was disheartening for me during those years where he was unable to attend due to cancer treatments or other complications, but delightful when we had a chance to catch up. Denis was always so happy to talk about how proud he was of his wife and children, his latest project focusing on teaching, and some "crazy" idea he had that sounded less and less crazy as he explained it to me and why it was important to him. Denis was a principled man ready to confront injustices and work for the disadvantaged.

His zeal and compassion for his students and their learning has made a mark in my professional life. We co-authored an article about teaching online, I adopted – with permission – many of his cases into my class discussions or assignments, and he would always challenge me to be better as a role model for my students as he was for his.

Yes, many of us have great stories to share and I hope we have a chance to do that in person at a Academy of Management conference very soon. But, until then, I am delighted to have been touched by Denis as a friend, colleague, and mentor.

My life is a little emptier with Denis's passing but my life is also more abundant by all the gifts and blessings he freely gave to me during his life.

Thank you my dear friend and thoroughly enjoy your new "spirit world," as I know you will.