

Megan Cooperman

## Remembering Carol Weinberg

*Carol Weinberg, who passed away this summer after a courageous battle with cancer, played a crucial role in preparing the soil for Reflections to grow and flourish. She was the first professor to hold the France-Merrick Chair of Service-Learning at Goucher College and was nationally recognized for the interdisciplinary service-learning senior capstone course she designed. The winner of the Baltimore Playwrights Festival award for her plays Every Suzie and Sal, Keeping the Faith, and Freedom Summer, Carol was also the author of The Transition Guide for College Juniors and Seniors: How To Prepare for the Future.*

“You need to make a decision. You either stay or go. You were accepted as a transfer student elsewhere. You need to make up your mind.”

I clearly remember my mother saying these words to me at the end of my third semester at Goucher.

“But Mom,” I told her, “this woman, Carol Weinberg, who coordinates community service at Goucher asked *me* to help set-up a new Special Olympics program on campus.”

At the time I didn’t realize what a profound impact “this woman” would have on my life and how her invitation to get involved, her belief in me, and her unwavering encouragement would lead me to the meaningful work I do today.

When I first met Carol I was a dance major looking for somewhere to “fit in” on campus. Unfortunately for me, I was trying hard to be accepted in a department that didn’t seem to want me, and my confidence and self-esteem were suffering.

In November of my sophomore year I reluctantly signed up to participate in an Into the Streets one-day community service event some students and Carol had planned. I was sent in a van full of students to volunteer at a Special Olympics soccer tournament. When we returned, we were invited to attend a pizza party for the closing of the event. (I didn’t know then - but of course I know now - that the underlying purpose was to engage us in reflection on our experiences). It was there that I first talked to Carol.

Carol asked us how our volunteer experience at Special Olympics had gone. I remember telling her what an amazing experience I had and

why. Then Carol, in her inimitable way, asked, “Well, can I run something by you? Would you like to bring Special Olympics to campus?”

I remember at the time feeling surprised that a faculty member believed I could accomplish something so ambitious. Over the next years, though, I witnessed how these same casual, collegial invitations—“Do you have a minute? Can I run something by you?”—would launch conversations and collaborations that led to the creation of countless CAUSE (Community Auxiliary for Service) programs, a host of long term partnerships between Goucher and Baltimore City schools and neighborhood associations, a remarkable 30% of Goucher faculty incorporating service-learning into their courses, and the award winning interdisciplinary service-learning capstone course that Carol envisioned and nurtured into reality.

During my years as a CAUSE team leader and co-president I met on a weekly basis with Carol to “touch base,” plan and discuss upcoming programs, and brainstorm on how to overcome difficult challenges. There was no artifice about Carol. She was direct and straightforward, with an honesty softened by her upbeat humor and outlook on life. Carol always rewarded our accomplishments, helped us see the “bigger picture,” challenged us to grow, and reminded us to laugh. She also took great pleasure in taking us out to eat in places that reminded her of her hometown—New York style pizza, fresh bagels, and Italian ices among her favorites.

One of my strongest memories of working with Carol was a day when CAUSE bought and donated holiday gifts for a single mother and

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her children in Baltimore City. The afternoon Carol and I went to deliver the toys stands out in my mind as the first time I truly understood the privileges I had been given in life. The mother and her children lived in a run down row house that had minimal furniture and no lock on the door. Here I had thought I would feel good for donating gifts, but instead I felt overwhelmed and disturbed by the woman's situation. We spent the next hour talking about the family, my feelings, and what I had learned. Carol listened, offered her thoughts, helped me process and reflect on this experience, and encouraged me to think about how I could do more to learn about these issues and create change. She validated my feelings and helped me understand that service is connected to social justice, reminding me that by working together people can create a better society.

Carol had a knack for connecting with students, respecting each of us as individuals, inspiring and challenging us to grow in both knowledge and character. She helped us to set attainable goals and recognize how our involvement in service related to our academic studies.

I stayed at Goucher college and graduated with a psychology degree because Carol

Weinberg saw potential in me, made me feel valued, and helped me find and build community. She is an unparalleled example of how one faculty member can make a lasting difference in a student's life, in my case leading me to my present position as Coordinator for Community Service Involvement and Leadership at Maryland.

Last October, Carol introduced me to Joe Chiappa, a senior and now recent graduate of Goucher. After explaining to Joe where I work, his response was, "Wow, so you are Carol Weinberg at Maryland." I could receive no greater compliment.

On July 30, 2001 Carol Weinberg passed away after a long battle with cancer. She had a profound impact on the people who were fortunate enough to learn from her, work with her, and know her. Her loss to me personally and to our field is deep, but her legacy is strong.

*Megan Cooperman is the Coordinator for Community Service Involvement and Leadership in Commuter Affairs and Community Service at the University of Maryland. She received her masters in K-12 school counseling from the University of Maryland.*

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# REFLECTIONS

ON COMMUNITY-BASED WRITING

English Department  
Goucher College  
1021 Dulaney Valley Rd.  
Baltimore, MD 21204