

### 3-29-19 A Tribute to John Kearns

John R. Kearns, originally from Hingham and a resident of Halifax and Quincy for thirty years, died in his sleep on March 18, 2019 in Quincy, Massachusetts. He was born on June 10, 1927. He died alone but not unloved or unappreciated.



If you met John once, you met his intelligence, eloquence, humility, drive to survive and his enduring mission of helping young people. His career, spanning decades, involved his love of sports. He created a program of modified athletics to assist mentally and physically challenged youth achieve confidence and health.

John graduated from Springfield College in 1951, majoring in Physical Education.

This highly intelligent man could have been an engineer, for he was constantly inventing and making drawings of multi-use tables, chairs and walkers that served more than one purpose, and he enjoyed describing the ideal components of neighborhoods and communities. While he did not become an engineer, he did receive a master's in education and the decades following his college education embodied Springfield College's ideals of "Humanics". That "philosophy calls for educating students in spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to others. We focus on helping students develop the whole person so they can serve as leaders in their communities, organizations, companies—wherever their next steps take them." (from the college's website)

Some of John's work in humanics included scout camp unit leader, camp waterfront director, supervisor at the Boston Boy's Club, and Camp Wing in Duxbury. His Master's degree practicum involved a week-long deep woods experience with children described as emotionally disturbed, accompanied by a psychologist, and he noted "with marked success".

John continued his humanics work during World War II, where he was the director of recreational activities for over two thousand military dependent youths on Okinawa, sports director for the New London Submarine Base and the 313<sup>th</sup> Air Force on Okinawa. He closed his professional career in the Boston schools where

he initiated the adapted physical education program for special needs students and instructed there for twenty years.

He wrote, "I do not list my work experience for self-aggrandizement but rather to explain why my view of the structure of programs designed to provide creditable development of young people should conform to a clearly stated and clearly understood code of behaviors, rules and objectives of the program."

His dream was to establish a trust fund for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to have a program like the ones he taught for so many years.

There was some correspondence with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and some attempts to establish a trust fund for his dream. However, health problems late in life, including hearing and vision difficulties hampered achieving those goals. While attempting to leave his legacy, he kept true to his training, true to the "Springfield Triangle" of spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to others.

At age 91, John did not need assistance getting up from a chair and he constantly exercised his mind. He wrote directions (with his own drawn maps), recipes (with notes on the results), quotes from radio programs, word definitions, and perhaps most entertaining and thought-provoking of all, his observations and philosophical views. Here are a few:

"The essence of growth is the presence of nutrition and the removal or reduction of elements that interfere with that growth."

"The hustler can exploit and break faith with a lot of people, but not Mother Nature!!"

"Unlike frogs, humans can choose the size pond in which they exist."

John's dream of "a well-run boys' and girls' club" was central to his identity and his purpose in life. He wrote, "Placing a young person in a well-run Boys and Girls club milieu should create a second family environment for that boy or girl.

The setting must have a fair and firmly maintained structure set of limits. These limits must be based upon respect for fellow club members and be clearly understood and accepted by each member.

The club can achieve loyalty and fellowship through activities that appeal to the young and sustain their interest."

John's ideals remind me of Benjamin Franklin's.

John was even ahead of the emergency preparedness curve, as he wrote this:

“A Boy Scout meeting building would not only host the troop meetings but would also serve as an emergency shelter for fire and weather distress situations victims that would involve scouts as temporary hosts.

- Cots
- Food
- Generator power
- First aid supplies
- Bathroom facilities
- Wood/coal heat stove”

This was a thinking man.

He was a good man.

May you rest in peace, John Kearns.

While John was clear about his wishes to establish a trust fund, I do not know that he accomplished it. If anyone knows of a notarized document, such as a will, please contact me and let's help John's wishes to be honored.

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