

Image #1: Peace Monument

It's a modest monument. Some people don't realize it's the "Peace Monument" because nothing sticks vertically up—it's flat with the earth. Here's a story from Gordie's handout on "Environmental Research" for his Sociology of Empowerment course, which speaks to his sense of the power of this earthbound dove:

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing" was the answer.

"In that case I must tell you a marvelous story," the coal-mouse said.

"I sat on the branch of a fir, close to the trunk, when it began to snow—not heavily, not a raging blizzard, but just like in a dream, without a sound and without any violence. Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch—nothing more than nothing, as you say—the branch broke off."

The dove, since Noah's time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while and finally said to herself, "Perhaps there is only one person's voice lacking for peace in the world."

Image #2: Gordie and Ezra at the ribbon cutting:

Unfortunately I can't show other images of the installation ceremony: according to our lawyers the "discernible face" of a Brandeis student must not be seen. So the student in this image is Gordie's son Ezra, learning how to eat lunch without smearing it all over his face (as you'd see in images that I can't show).

Gordie went there every Friday for the Peace Vigil, adding his snowflake. In bold print next to an image of the vigil at the PAX webpage we now see the words "Suspended until further notice."

Gordie Fellman was born in 1934, in Omaha Nebraska, to Rosa Mae Shyken Fellman and her husband Charles, a grocer, to whose "joys and struggles" Gordie dedicated his second book, *Rambo and the Dalai Lama: The Compulsion to Win*

and Its Threat to Human Survival. He was a success at North High School, despite not playing football: student council president, local Red Cross president, talented debater. One of his teacher's broached the topic of college, and fatefully suggested the progressive college of Antioch in Ohio. At Antioch his eyes flew open--he discovered Marx, and Freud, and with a multiracial group of Antioch students integrated the Yellow Springs movie theater and barber shop. Off and running, headlong, into a life of activism and scholarship fused at the hip: next at Harvard, where he worked with Erik Erikson on a dissertation about the charismatic Indian leftist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, and then at the Brandeis Department of Sociology, in the '60s and '70s a nest of activist scholars and rogue intellectuals. He formed long, productive relationships with the Morrie's Stein and Schwartz and Charlie Fisher, with whom he team-taught, as he did with others across campus in various departments, centers and schools: an early interdisciplinary scholar--or in a French friend's term, "indisciplinaire." **Image #3: Gordie reading, looking down** (Here he is leaning against the wall of Perlman looking avidly intellectual and sexily *indisciplinaire*.) He had a hand in everything—twice chair of his department, founding director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program, co-organizer of the National Student Strike and active in the eight-year struggle to make Brandeis divest its endowment from companies doing business with the apartheid state of South Africa, he was a public intellectual, writing for Tikkun, Haaretz, the Los Angeles Times, the Forward, a Fulbright scholar in Israel, where he joined neighbors' struggles in a working class Jerusalem neighborhood and conceived the book that became *Rambo and the Dalai Lama*, co-chair of the New Jewish Agenda's Middle East task force, Board member at Antioch, loyal friend of the National Women's Committee and the Rose Art Museum, member of Women's and Gender Studies, the Cultural Production Program, FACT, the University chorus, long involved in resistance to an 8-lane "Inner Belt" highway planned by the state to run from I-93 in Somerville through Cambridge, the Fenway, Brookline and Roxbury to the Southeast Expressway.

The infamous Inner Belt would have wrecked the heart of Cambridge where Gordie lived. He couldn't substantively contribute to the Cambridge resistance of mainly architects, engineers and people who stood to lose their homes (which eventually spread to other cities, and triumphed). But a sociologist could

articulate the stakes of the struggle, and the situation the project typified--a situation Gordie fought to undo in every domain of his activity. His book on that long project, *The Deceived Majority*, begins with an epigraph from psychoanalyst Robert White that sums up, in plain English, the goal Gordie served all his life, as teacher, activist, friend, father: "The feeling of being able to have some effect on people, to get them to listen, provide some of the things we need, do some of the things we want, receive some of the love and help we want to give—this feeling of social competence is a substantial foundation stone of self-respect and security." Gordie dedicated his moving account of working class people's love of their homes and fear of their powerlessness:

TO ALL PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO INCREASE THEIR CONTROL OVER
THEIR OWN LIVES
AND
TO THOSE WHO HAVE STOPPED TRYING

Image #4 Gordie and the Sociology of Empowerment class in Welfleet (photo by his wife, Pamela Blau)

It's easy to see the thread leading from this to the great project of Gordie's life, liberatory teaching, exemplified and thematized in SOC 153 "The Sociology of Empowerment," whose syllabus includes the words of George Bernard Shaw: "...I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die; for the harder I work the more I live. **Image #5: Photo spread from *Justice* feature on G's 40th Brandeis anniversary** ...Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got a hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Gordie's iconic courses and classrooms are remembered vividly by Brandeis students we encounter across the country and the world: his teaching earned him the Louis Dembitz Brandeis award in 1999, the Student Union Best Teaching Award in 2007, and in 2021 the Peace and Justice Studies Association's Peace Educator-Scholar Award. **Image #6: Gordie teaching in Perlman** His other courses included "Marx and Freud," "Deconstructing War, Building Peace," "Social Class and Social Change," "Sociology of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation,"

“Masculinities,” “Public Sociology,” “Psychological Sociology.” He sometimes brought his Sociology students to the Rose, to gaze at paintings and think differently. His final paper assignment for SOC 153 asks them to “write in a calm, reflective mood, and please strive for the deepest connections and insights you can achieve.” [Imagine...] He team-taught with students as well as colleagues, listing the TA’s name with his atop syllabuses, and his grad student assistant Barbara Brandt as co-author of *The Deceived Majority*; his Acknowledgements are mini-encyclopedias of intellectual friendship; his final, unfinished work a philosophical dialogue, between a young woman and a curious Martian. And he shared the stages of his classroom and campus with an array of visitors, most famously Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Jimmy Carter [Image #7: Carter and Gordie] and the Dalai Lama. [Image #8: Gordie and the Dalai Lama.]

Gordie’s pedagogy urged that a torch you want to pass on had better be seen aflame from time to time. **Image #9: Gordie addressing a crowd (Pamela Blau’s photo)** He enabled action in his students and showed up for it himself, from crawling in a window late at night to meet with the Black students at the first Ford Hall occupation, to helping build the central campus shanty-town where students lived in protest of our investment in apartheid South Africa, to setting up Perlman as the physical headquarters for the National Student Strike (and fundraising to pay its \$26,000 phone bill at the end!) to hurling himself, with Professors Marc Auslander and Ramie Targoff, Rose Director Michael Rush, and the ingenious students of Cultural Production, into the struggle to save the Rose and its central collection from monetization during the Great Recession. Had Brandeis crossed that Rubicon, there’d have been no stopping sales around the world of iconic art to private collectors and speculators, which is why the *Globe*, Attorney General Coakley, and the Association of Art Museum Curators joined the struggle.

We don’t have time even to *list* all Gordie’s doings, but I’ll end the Adventures of Gordie by pointing to three interventions of recent decades:

Gordie’s most popular invitation was to the Dalai Lama in 1998: it began with “Seven Weeks on Tibet,” a series of 16 programs held by the Brandeis chapter of Students for a Free Tibet laying the groundwork for the visit of Boston-area Tibetan nuns to build a sand mandala on campus—which was perhaps the first time women had ever performed that sacred activity--and the visit of the Dalai

Lama on May 8-9, who dismantled the mandala. **Image #10: Dalai Lama inspects the mandala** It was an illuminating, joyful spring. Within a year, Gordie was finally married, to the musician and psychoanalyst Pamela Blau. In 2001 and 2003 they adopted a brother and sister from Boston, Ezra and Talia: **Image #11: Gordie and the kids** At last, Gordie had a loving family “to receive,” as Robert White would say, “some of the love and help [he] want[ed] to give.”

But even the happy events around the Dalai Lama carried a whiff of danger: after all, Tibet’s resistance against Chinese occupation of their land parallels Palestinian resistance to the occupation of Israel. The 2006-07 Brandeis Committee for the Visit of President Carter, which Gordie chaired, attracted more negative attention—there is hate mail in the archives. Jimmy Carter had just published *Palestine: Peace, not Apartheid* and the title had set fires. But among faculty and students there was a desire to show that Brandeis was a university, a secular one, and could handle dialogue with the distinguished author. For Gordie it was particularly important that he show the students of his usually team-taught seminar on Israel-Palestine that the conflict—which extends beyond the borders of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank to include our campus—could be handled in words, not violence, threats, or silence, could deepen understanding rather than invite adversarial posturing. The event attracted *good* attention as well: covered admiringly by the *Globe* and filmed by Jonathan Demme to serve as the final, climactic episode of his documentary, *The Man from Plains*. That film has not been shown at Brandeis to my knowledge, but it brought tears of pride to my eyes when I saw it nearby on Moody St. with Harry Mairson, who had initiated the visit. Carter too was impressed by Brandeis: **Image #12: Carter note.**

It took a lot of courage from Gordie, and Harry, and was I’m sure a monstrous headache for the staff of the Development Office, and Campus Police. But I want to end our Minute with Gordie by remembering a project that took more chutzpah than courage, coming to fruition not in tears but in balloons and cake.

Image #13: Ezra and Gordie at the Peace Monument (again)

The students of the fall 2000 Sociology of Empowerment course decided to create the peace monument on campus as a class project. They proposed to prepare the ground and build the monument themselves, imprinting words for “peace” in dozens of languages and alphabets into the bricks they would lay, and to raise

money themselves for the budget of \$8,000 they drew up. The University rejected their request.

Gordie stories take years in real life, however brief in the telling, and they start with NO: this one was no exception--though it didn't take as long as divestment in Apartheid. But still they persisted—and he was a fundraiser. By May 2003 the monument was built and the students back for the ribbon-cutting ceremony, though I can't show the photos.

What followed also took years, and surely brought peace: every Friday from 12-1 the Peace Vigil was held around the mosaic of the Peace Monument. Sometimes ten or 12 people were there, sometimes two or three, often it poured rain, or people stood freezing. Always Gordie was there, usually with his pal Father Cuenin. Year in, year out, they kept the peace for an hour a week. Like everything Gordie did, it required other people, and faith, and deep hope. Not just faith or hope that “peace will break out,” “peace will be declared”--the faith and hope to stand there in the rain and the wind, on the path we all go up and down to meetings, to lunch, to the train, “Burning as brightly as possible.”

Who stands at the Peace Monument now? No one. But because it was built, somebody—some snowflake!--will come stand there. That will be Gordie Fellman's legacy, and the legacy of SOC 153.

Image #14 Peace Monument with no one in the photo (again)