



Brandeis University

Commemorative Speech for Martin Halpern

Dear Faculty, thank you for the opportunity to share my appreciation for our late-colleague, Martin Halpern. Marty was a key player in the Department of Theater Arts from 1965 until he retired in 1994, becoming a Professor Emeritus. In addition to teaching literature courses, his principal focus was heading up the Master of Fine Arts Playwriting Program, as well as serving as department chair for seven years. Passionate, invested, nurturing and always at the ready to inspire his students to go farther, I always relished our talks in the hallway. Though we overlapped by only a few short years and my area was working with the MFA actors, I was always taken with Marty's interest in who was in what show and how do we continue to improve the interaction and collaboration of actors, designers and playwrights. I was further taken by his interest in my own professional career working in the theaters in Boston and New England.

In addition to having authored dozens of plays and receiving acclaim across the entire country, it is no surprise that Marty should demonstrate such broad interests as he was also an accomplished poet and musician and, immediately upon retiring, set off to gain a Master of Arts in Music Composition! From there, he began writing chamber operas to expand his portfolio. Possibly, my most fond discovery of his talents was during his time serving in the military when he hosted a country music radio program...yes, this boy from the Bronx possessed some varied interests!

I am still quite close friends with one of his former students, Christopher Greco, who shared this about Marty: "He was a rare believer in my development as a playwright because he embraced the spiritual thrust of my creative process rather than arguing with it. We didn't see eye to eye, but he met me eye to eye and I am still working in theater in large part because of his belief in me. Just this week, I referenced to students the Passover question that Marty would evoke in defining when to begin a play: 'How is this day different from every other day?'"

He was a valued member of the theater faculty and an exceptional teacher. Our sincere condolences to his family.