

On Jack Jarpe  
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Every now and again, a former student of mine at the university emails me with an update on how she's doing, and she asks what's going on with me. Especially in retirement sitting here day after day—is it Wednesday or Thursday?—it boosts my spirits to hear from her and be reminded of the time, three years ago now, when I was a professor with my name on an office door.

My former student is around twenty-seven and teaching in a high school in the Midwest, and that prompts me to think back to when I was the same age and doing the same thing. In my case it was North Saint Paul, Minnesota in the second half of the 1960s. North High--the Polars, as the teams were called.

It's early in the morning, a little after 6:00 a.m., and the image of Jack Jarpe from my high school teaching years just popped in my consciousness, however that happens--this was fifty years ago, a half century, my gosh. Jack was the school librarian. I taught social studies—history, economics, current events, that sort of thing. Jack was about thirty at the time, a few years older than I was. He was of average height, trim, short brown hair parted on the side, glasses, conservatively dressed, kind of preppy-looking, soft-spoken, positive in outlook, a classy person; Jack was a gentleman, a gentle man.

Jack and I became workplace acquaintances. I wouldn't call Jack a friend exactly, though he was my closest connection at the school. Neither of us gave any energy to staying in contact after I left the high school when I was twenty-eight to become an instructor at the University of Minnesota and pursue a doctorate in education. I haven't seen Jack since the late '60s.

Jack and I ate lunch together, and we worked out together at the school gym. Jack was in superb physical condition (I just now Googled him and saw that he won a state long-distance running

competition in 1970). In stark contrast, I remember taking note of my soft, pasty, bloated 225-pound body (I now weigh 170) in the locker room mirror on the way to taking a shower after my workout (such as it was—I can't imagine that I went at it too hard back then). It strikes me now how I wasn't alarmed at what I was seeing in the mirror. I sure would be now.

Jack came up with the idea for the two of us starting a book discussion group at the school. We'd pick a book and invite students to discuss it with us once a week, or perhaps it was every two weeks, I can't remember. That sounded like a good idea to me; I went along with just about anything in those days. Jack selected the book, *The Making of the President 1960* by Theodore White. I couldn't have picked a book. Don Riley's sport column in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* newspaper was the extent of my reading back then.

Four or five students expressed interest in our book discussion group. Jack set up a meeting time in a small room in the library and specified the chapters we would discuss at our first meeting. I did the assigned reading, but I really didn't take in what the book was about or its details, and I had no thoughts that I wanted to share when we got together. I just showed up at the appointed time. I don't imagine that I said much of anything at the meeting; I never said much of anything in any public setting other than in front of classes where I had to.

We met that once and then the project fell flat, we never met again. Jack and I never discussed what went wrong. We just dropped the matter, which suited both of us. Jack was about as introverted as I was (and still am), which I suppose was one of the reasons we connected so well.

Jack and I went to the Polars' Friday night football games together. I remember on those cool, crisp fall evenings feeling peaceful and in place, settled, where I belonged in the world, contented, which most certainly was not my characteristic state of being back then (nor has it been since).

I remember one time in particular. Jack and I were standing

next to the wire-mesh fence that surrounded the field cheering and jumping up and down ecstatically as the son of the principal--his last name was Arns, it comes back to me after all this time--ran a kickoff back for a touchdown to win the game. As I think about it sitting here in front of this computer screen, that was one of the best, happiest, moments of my life. Would I have been better off if I had stayed in North High instead of going on to university work?

Jack was respectful to me, he took me seriously, he treated me as if I mattered, he was kind to me, he had time for me, and I remember having trouble taking that in. Why would anyone treat me like that? Really, why would anyone want to have anything to do with me? Sad but telling, as I think about it, that I felt that way about myself back then. I wish now that I had stayed in touch with Jack after I left North High. But in those years, I didn't keep anything, or anybody, going, including a beautiful, dear, first family.

Just now, I Googled Jack's name. There was the track result I mentioned earlier. And also, Jack's obituary in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* of June 25, 2011.

#### Jack Daly Jarpe

Age 74 Of Lake Elmo, MN Died June 18, at his home. Remembered as a compassionate and generous man, Jack is survived by wife Carole; mother Laura; and children, John, Amy (Matt Moore) and Anne Wakely (Scott). Jack is also survived by siblings Geoff (Lezlie), John (Mary Kay), Diane Starke (Robert), and Marion (Jay), as well as grandchildren Jack, Rosie, Simon, Joe and Gunnar and beloved pets Charro and Tootsie. Jack is preceded in death by father Gunnar and brother Jay. A visitation will be held at 10:00 am on Monday, June 27 at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in North Saint Paul, MN. A Memorial Service will follow at 11:00 am. Memorial contributions may be sent to Heifer International ([www.heifer.org/](http://www.heifer.org/) registry) or Catholic Charities (attn: Dan Sloan, 1200 2nd Ave., Mpls, MN 55403).

Compassionate and generous, that was Jack Jarpe. It looks as if he created a fine family, so nice to read that.

What a long life I've lived. That was me at the high school football game in Minnesota with Jack Jarpe a half century ago, and I'm still here. Jack's gone and I'm still here, sitting on this leather couch in Burlington, Vermont with my memories. I wish I could thank Jack for being so good to me and tell him how much that meant to me back then, but I can't. It's eight o'clock on a Thursday morning—yes, it's Thursday--and the best thing I can think of to do is make breakfast.