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Farewell to a Friend - with "Love"

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Peter Rosen, MD, FAAEM, one of the main founding fathers and mothers in the field of emergency medicine, passed away in Tucson, Arizona, on the 11th of November 2019 from complications of chronic diseases, with his best friend and wife Ann at his side. He was 84 years old.

Dr. Rosen dedicated decades of his life advocating and promoting the field of emergency medicine as a medical discipline and academic specialty, one that stands in parity with all other primary categorical specialties. He obviously succeeded since emergency medicine is flourishing across the USA as well as many of the developing and developed nations in the world.

During his six decades of service to the specialty, Peter founded the Journal of Emergency Medicine (JEM) and our specialty's first complete textbook ("Rosen's Emergency Medicine: Concepts and Clinical Practice"). He authored hundreds of academic articles and supported hundreds of academic programs and faculty in their personal or departmental journeys advocating for their patients while advancing their careers and the specialty. He also founded two prominent emergency medicine residency programs and served as a faculty member at numerous others.

His 1979 essay, "The Biology of Emergency Medicine," was a historical milestone that defined for a field, still in its infancy, the core responsibilities of a well-trained emergency physician. He reasoned persuasively that physicians from other specialties, who typically had expertise in only one particular aspect of emergency medicine, could not adequately replace the qualified well-trained emergency physician.

Dr. Rosen was respected and loved by many. He mentored hundreds of us – physicians, students and friends. He blended the bright intellectual with the tactless indiscreet. He knew when not to be diplomatic and how to stand firm! But he also knew when to just walk away. He certainly left us all with memorable moments - many of them peculiarly entertaining. Peter just knew how to throw a punch, be blunt and make you smile!

Peter's legacy was recognized with numerous honors and awards including his 1993 election as the first emergency physician invited to join the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. His awards include the 1990 Leadership Award from the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine (SAEM), the 1977 and 1984 American College of Emergency Physicians' Outstanding Contribution to Emergency Medicine Award and the 1994 Award for Outstanding Contribution in Education.

On a personal note, I shall always remember Peter my own way...

Let me start with how he stared me down on a Boston sidewalk the first time we met in 1997. A group of us were heading out from the main hotel at the annual SAEM Conference. I asked Steve Hayden: "Who is that tall gentleman with a moustache accompanying you and indiscreetly studying me?" He smiled and said: "Peter – Peter Rosen." I should point out that I was then a vibrant 32 year old wearing a Cuban Guevara black beret, a German leather biker jacket and Texan alligator boots while attending our premier annual scientific meeting. So how can I ever forget those moments considering that it was that same night when Peter, Steve and the whole UC San Diego class of EM residents decided to bond by piercing eyebrows, lips and ears!

It took me another year to figure out Peter actually liked me. He ran into me in the hallway of a Palm Springs hotel and invited me to his room to chat. We sat on the balcony where he initiated me to smoking cigars. He omitted one relevant pearl: I was NOT supposed to inhale the smoke. That was understandably my first and last cigar.

Peter was there for me for the rest of my career. For two decades, he was always readily available guiding me as a leader in the American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) and as an academician engaged in international Emergency Medicine development. He provided invaluable support and mentorship establishing the Mediterranean Emergency Medicine Congress (MEMC) and the "Rules of the Road for Medical Students" textbook, and contributing to the founding and growth of the actual American Academy. He mentored me when I faced conflict and challenge in a variety of contexts internationally and nationally with other organizations in emergency medicine. He always found time to listen and to help.

In 2009, I faced one of the most difficult challenges in my life as a founding chair for the first department of emergency medicine at the American University of Beirut. At the time of my contract renewal as a chair, the institutional leadership at the time pressured me to sign a new contract that would engage Emergency Medicine, in my opinion, as a poorly-paid vertically-integrated second-tier discipline within the medical faculty. I wanted parity with other specialists and specialties for EM faculty.

Peter took me out for dinner with my late wife Cristina and shared his own 1970's story that mirrored mine. That night in San Diego, Peter called me the 'K factor" – "an agent of change." He described how "agents of change" create chaos initially, but should be wholeheartedly embraced "if they were capable and well intentioned" - as they are "essential to succeed in properly disrupting the sterile stagnation of status quo" in engrained institutions, systems, organizations, etc.

He told me his story at the University of Chicago when he established one of the first 3 residency programs in the history of the specialty. That program then graduated a significant number of giants in our specialty. He told me that when faced with adversity, "there is a time to make a stand and a time to let go." "However, never let go on issues of principle": the principle of parity between emergency medicine and all other disciplines. "You get things (support) from those in power ONLY on the way IN and on the way OUT."

He stood by me – a guiding lighthouse and a supportive friend and giant. I declined to sign the dean's offer to chair the department for another 3 years. This forced change and laid the grounds that enabled our group to secure proper support, resources and parity. We now have an exceptional vibrant ACGME-International accredited residency program, fellowship training and an open-access medical journal. EM won!

For the rest of my life, I shall proudly carry the "Peter Rosen Award" for service and leadership to the specialty, which the AAEM established to recognize this giant in the history of our specialty. However, I shall always feel a deep heartache thinking of my friend Peter. And I know that I shall always stare at my inbox looking for another one of those messages from Psoc@aol.com with the precious "Love, Peter" at the bottom.

Yes… I never said it! And it is time! I love you Peter.