

Bill Bradford, Ayn Rand, and Coney Island¹

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On 8 December 2005, R. W. Bradford, a founding co-editor of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, passed away. He was 58 years old. He left behind his wife Kathy, many friends, and a legacy of liberty. In this remembrance, Chris Matthew Sciabarra pays tribute to the man who made this journal possible. In this issue, we also note the passing of two other individuals who have made important contributions to Rand studies: Joan Kennedy Taylor and Christopher Ronald Tame.

It was early September 1995. The ink had barely dried on my new book, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, and Bill Bradford picked up the phone and asked me if I'd like to take a trip out to Tacoma to appear at the Liberty Editors Conference alongside Barbara Branden and John Hospers on a panel entitled "Ayn Rand: The Philosopher Behind the Myth."

I remember how much I enjoyed that conference. It was the very first time that I'd had the opportunity to discuss the newly published book before an audience, and Bill's support of my work in this context was simply invaluable. Unfortunately, right before I was to join the panel, I was compelled to go up to my hotel room to change out of my soaked suit and into a clean—and dry—T-shirt and a pair of shorts; I'd been sitting in the back of the room waiting for the panel to begin when, suddenly, a bucket filled with rainwater came crashing through the dropped ceiling, missing me by a couple of feet, but dousing me in what felt like all the rainwater of Washington state. Bill was worried that I'd gotten hurt; in the end, however, we'd shared quite a chuckle over the near-catastrophe.

The panel discussion went almost as swimmingly as my bucket experience. When the conference was over, I remember being so

deeply grateful to Bill for having provided us with such a wonderful forum, a brief respite for freedom-lovers to engage one another in meaningful discussion. But this was, after all, a mere extension of his magazine, *Liberty*, which remains *the* forum for such discussion in libertarian circles.

In actuality, the conference was not the first time I'd met Bill and his wonderful wife Kathy. That meeting had come in May 1995. Bill had previously published one of my pieces in *Liberty*, but on this occasion he had made the trip out to New York City to speak at Victor Niederhoffer's Junto on the topic of the "future of liberty." The real fun happened later, when Bill and Kathy took the trip out to my home, so that I could take them both on my world-famous tour of Brooklyn. It was a journey through parks, piers, and promenades, from the Boardwalk and Nathan's in Coney Island to the L&B Spumoni Gardens, from Bay Ridge and Sheepshead Bay to Park Slope and Brooklyn Heights. Bill told me that it was the best New York-related tour he'd ever experienced.

But none of this whirlwind touring compared to the adventure upon which we embarked when Bill came up with the idea of founding a new scholarly journal devoted to the life and work of Ayn Rand.

Back in the Summer of 2003 on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the first issue of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, I revisited the founding. I wrote at the time:

I had been working very hard to secure a copy of the ever elusive Ayn Rand college transcript from the University of St. Petersburg, an important postscript to my historical and archival work on Rand's beginnings as explored in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (Penn State Press, 1995). Bill Bradford, editor of *Liberty* magazine, had told me that he envisioned two articles that I would write: the first would tell the dramatic story of the struggle to locate the transcript—in the face of serious obstacles to my efforts; the second would present my findings. The first would be published in *Liberty*, said Bradford; the second would be published in a new

journal of Rand scholarship that I would edit.

“Huh? A new journal? One that I’d edit? I’m too busy for this! Did you say, a journal of Rand scholarship? Did I hear you correctly? Are you *crazy*?”

Then, out loud, I said: “Okay.”

With the publication of the premier issue of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* (JARS) in September of 1999, Bradford, literature professor Stephen Cox, and I had cofounded the first academic periodical devoted to Rand scholarship. (Sciabarra 2003, 10)

Without Bill’s financial support and publishing savvy, the journal would never have been born. One of the last things he ever said to me was that as long as I wished to continue editing the journal, there would be funding for its publication, even after his passing. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* is here to stay: It was Bill Bradford’s brainchild. And it’s now a maturing academic periodical indexed by well over a dozen significant abstracting services in the humanities and social sciences.²

None of this is to say that we didn’t have our ups and downs. Bill took a laissez-faire attitude toward my editing of content, and I took a laissez-faire attitude toward his management of the business of JARS. Every so often, however, some decision on his part irked me. And there was one time when we had an awful mix-up with a JARS cover that made me turn several shades of blue darker than that cover.

But here was the entrepreneurial brilliance of Bill Bradford: When things got screwed up, even once, he took full responsibility for it. And he made every effort to correct the errors to make sure that they would never reappear. And reappear they didn’t. He streamlined the publishing process and provided me with a blueprint for a seamless publication schedule that we’ve adhered to ever since.

My professional engagement with Bill remained secondary to our personal friendship. Bill knew that I suffered from an intestinal

condition, with vast complications, which made travel very difficult, if not impossible, for me. He always provided a word of support and encouragement. And I cherished our phone calls, where we talked about everything from politics to the newest gossip in the libertarian movement.

When he became ill, I'd like to think that he drew some strength from the fact that I had survived for 46 years with a congenital disease. But when it became clear that the cancer was consuming him, Bill was the picture of realism—and levity. He once remarked: “Your condition may have nearly killed you a few times, and I figure you’ve got to be thankful that you’re living on borrowed time. Heck, you might survive, sick as a dog, till you’re 90.” And then he paused. “But this thing is going to kill me sooner than later.”

My Greek and Sicilian roots shone through on that phone chat—I told him that I loved him dearly. And he said “thanks.” I know he choked back tears. But he also signed his next email to me: “Love, Bill.”

Bill Bradford was a dear and supportive friend. He was an energetic and principled man of liberty from whom I learned much and to whom I owe a great deal. I will miss him enormously. And I honor his memory.

Notes

1. A version of this article appeared in *Liberty* magazine. See Sciabarra 2006b.
2. Indeed, recently, JARS was selected as a new addition to three of the most prestigious indices in the international community of scholars. The journal will be fully abstracted and indexed by the Arts & Humanities Citation Index and Current Contents/Arts & Humanities. And abstracts of relevant journal articles centered on the social sciences (economics, political science, psychology, etc.) will be selectively included in the Social Sciences Citation Index. See Sciabarra 2006a.

References

- Sciabarra, Chris Matthew. 2003. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*: Four years and counting. *The Free Radical* 57 (July-August): 10–11.
- _____. 2006a. Wonderful news for JARS. *Notablog*. Online at: <<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/sciabarra/notablog/archives/000989.html>>. (27 January).
- _____. 2006b. R. W. Bradford, 1947–2005: Ayn Rand and Coney Island. *Liberty* 20, no. 3 (March): 28–29.