
Tribute

A Tribute to Leo H. McAvoy, Jr.

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Most everyone who knows Leo McAvoy thinks the world of him. You might expect after 33 years in higher education, after grading all those papers, after scoring all those exams, after guiding 34 doctoral students, 80 master's students, and countless undergraduate students through their programs of study, there would be somebody out there with some residual hard feelings, with an axe to grind. But there doesn't seem to be. Leo is universally liked, admired and respected by his students, co-workers, and colleagues across the country. These feelings are not likely to change now that he has retired.

Though I am intellectually indebted to both the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota, my heart belongs to Minnesota. I attribute this feeling to the way I was treated from the moment I stepped onto the Twin Cities campus in the fall of 1974. After John Schultz, Head of what was then called the Division of Recreation, Park and Leisure Studies, greeted me and gave me a brief overview of things to come, he quickly turned me over to Leo. In the middle of the doctoral program himself, Leo took me under his wing, introduced me to his wife, Kate, his two little girls, Sheila and Molly, and welcomed me into their circle of friends. We soon became pals. Two years later, when Leo completed his doctoral studies, the faculty decided he was too promising to let go, and so they asked him to stay. He accepted an assistant professor's position, and has been faithful to the University of Minnesota ever since.

I am fond of telling people that I was Leo's student, as if that fact makes me a lot younger than him somehow. The truth of the matter is that we are not so far apart in age, temperament, or worldview. We both served in the military during the Vietnam era, and we both took advantage of the G. I. Bill to help pay for graduate school. We also share a commitment to enjoying and protecting the environment. This mutual concern has flavored most of our collaborative work. From our initial thought pieces in *Environmental Ethics* (Dustin & McAvoy, 1980; Dustin & McAvoy, 1982; Dustin & McAvoy, 1984a), to advocating for no-rescue wilderness (McAvoy & Dustin, 1981a; McAvoy & Dustin, 1981b; McAvoy & Dustin, 1983a; McAvoy & Dustin, 1984; McAvoy, Dustin, Rankin, & Frakt, 1985), to position papers on outdoor recreation resource planning and management (McAvoy & Dustin, 1983b; Dus-

tin & McAvoy, 1984b; Dustin, McAvoy, & Beck, 1986; Beck, McAvoy, & Dustin, 1989; Dustin, More, & McAvoy, 2000; Dustin, Schneider, McAvoy, & Frakt, 2002), to three editions of *Stewards of Access/Custodians of Choice: A Philosophical Foundation for the Park and Recreation Profession* (Dustin, McAvoy, & Schultz, 1982, 1995, 2002), Leo and I have plodded along contentedly like two trail horses. This compatibility has made it possible for us to sustain a writing relationship spanning three decades. We have published more than forty articles, books, and monographs together, though geography never has been our ally.

Leo has made many significant independent and collaborative contributions to the literature, including making outdoor recreation and outdoor education more accessible to people with disabilities (Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, & Rynders, 1993; McAvoy & Lais, 1999), improving outdoor adventure education (Anderson, Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, & Seligman, 1997), refining outdoor leadership techniques (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005) and, more recently, better understanding American Indian attitudes toward the land (Jostad, McAvoy, & McDonald, 1996; McDonald & McAvoy, 1997; McAvoy, 2002; McAvoy, McDonald, & Carlson, 2003). Leo has accomplished this extensive body of work while professing some fundamental misgivings about his own analytic abilities (McAvoy, 2006, forthcoming). He is, then, living testimony to the virtues of self-discipline, hard work and perseverance.

What inspired me most in observing Leo over the years was the joy he exhibited when working with students, when advancing the field of parks and recreation through his scholarly writing and public speaking, and when collaborating with colleagues across the United States and Canada on various research projects. Leo's success has been a byproduct of practicing what he preached. He was not only a student of outdoor recreation planning and policy; he was an outdoor enthusiast himself. Whether it was snow camping with his students in Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in mid-winter, or backpacking with his students in Montana's Beartooth Wilderness in mid-summer, you could always tell when Leo was in his element. There was a gleam in his eyes.

Leo will long be remembered for his scholarship, but he will live on most vividly through the lives of those 34 doctoral students and 80 master's students he mentored over the years. Many of them are now accomplished professors in their own right, and they continue to attribute their fundamental optimism and enthusiasm for their careers to Leo's influence. There is just something about the way Leo treated students, even when he was critical of their work, which left them feeling good about themselves and him. He modeled "right professorhood."

Leo was the consummate educator. He worked hard like he was taught to as a boy, and he rose steadily through the ranks. He distinguished himself nationally and then internationally through his teaching, scholarship and service. He received our academic field's highest accolades, including induction into the Academy of Leisure Sciences in 1988, being selected as the Society of Park and Recreation Educators' Distinguished Colleague in 2004,

and being honored with the Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Research that same year. Through it all, Leo kept his feet on the ground, befitting a humble midwestern farmer's son. He was modest and kind, while exuding sincerity, dignity, and professionalism. Leo was one of a kind. He will never be replaced, though many will try to emulate him. And he will always be remembered first and foremost as a gentleman.

It is a fitting tribute to Leo McAvoy that his name is now enshrined in stone on the University of Minnesota Alumni Center's "walk of fame." Minnesota could not have asked for a better ambassador to the larger world.

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