

At Memorial Service for Stuart Freedman, November 18, 2012

Bob Cahn

I met Stuart in 1967, when I began graduate school in physics at Berkeley. Stuart was two years ahead of me. At the time, I believe he was still a theory student, working for Charles Zemach. After Zemach left Berkeley, Stuart switched to do experimental physics with Gene Commins. He was one of the remarkable students Gene had in that era, including Frank Calaprice, Steve Chu, Phil Bucksbaum, and Persis Drell. Stuart, Mel Simmons, and my almost cousin Bob Fisher were among my physics grad student pals.

After Stuart and I left Berkeley, our peregrinations didn't cross except at occasional meetings. He went to Princeton, Stanford, and Chicago, while I went to Stanford, Seattle, and Michigan. I was back in Berkeley in 1979 and when the opportunity arose several years later, I was among those who pushed for Berkeley to bring Stuart back, and he and Joyce returned in 1991.

Those of us who were physics students at Berkeley around 1970 were in awe of the greats walking the halls: Luis Alvarez, Owen Chamberlain, Emilio Segre, and younger stars like Gene Commins, Dave Jackson, Gerson Goldhaber, and George Trilling. They were the models we hoped to follow in some small way. Were I a Berkeley student today, Stuart would have been the one I'd want to emulate. He was indeed a physicist's physicist. He understood physics deeply. He could identify what was worth doing, he knew what would be required to do it right, and that's what he did. He could challenge the orthodoxy by looking for free quarks and such, and defend the orthodoxy by unmasking the spurious claims made against it.

Stuart was a keen critique of bureaucratic incompetence, but what set him apart from so many of us who would join him in this avocation is that he never became truly cynical. Rather than becoming angry or bitter, he was benignly amused.

"Hey, Bob, c'm here," he would say with a nod of his head as I passed by his open office door. And I would always stop, turn around, and walk back to enter, because I knew this was going to be the most interesting thing that happened to me that day. I was going to learn something new and I was going to be entertained by his unique sense of humor.

Stuart's jokes, indeed, much of what he said, was enigmatic. Those who didn't know him well were generally baffled. But once you could understand his unique language, you were privileged to enter into his special perspective on the world. To tell the truth, when I sat down in his office it wasn't Stuart the Nuclear Physicist who sat across from me with his multiple computer screens and telephone headset, but Stuart the Philosopher. If you were lucky enough to have an office just around the corner from Stuart, you didn't have to climb to the top of some mountain in India to receive wisdom from a guru, you only needed to stop in when your friend said, "Hey, Bob, c'm here."

