

“Our Adieu to Our Beloved Peter Bishop” - Edith Minne

Made aware of our day of birth early on and not knowing our day of death, we live our life—a life made of the space between our first and last breath. Witnessing the last breath of a friend and beloved one is the ultimate experience of saying “good night.”

For Peter and I, it happened on March 21st, the first day of spring, Bach’s birthday, at 4:04 on a lovely sunlit afternoon, accompanied by the celestial sounds of the harp. And yet it was final.

Dear Peter, I placed a daffodil in your hand—eternal symbol of spring.

It became time to rise up with Peter and for each of us to offer, to our School and to the Gods, the sacrifice of our individual suffering.

The next day, all of our friends from Apollo were invited to come and experience, with beauty and respect, the separation of this body and soul with a visit to Peter’s body, left lifeless and yet so purely beautiful. Above Peter’s head hung a celestial impression of dancing nymphs—white porcelain on a blue background—lifting up our gaze towards the new horizon where we will meet again.

It was a long cordon of 350 students who came silently and with presence, with offerings of flowers and emotions, from the door to the room, to the garden, and down to the newly built Petrarch (Peter-Arch) Press. Poetry was read, connecting us all. We were deeply moved and touched, silent embraces adding courage to our human hearts.

The friends stood in a line, as each, willingly and slowly, wrote a final love note to Peter. Later the notes were burnt and the love they contained went up to meet Peter—so says the Chinese legend.

Then the time came to prepare for the ceremony. We wanted to say to you, “Adieu Peter,” in a noble and dignified way. We gathered your close friends, giving thought on how to proceed with the octave, while we were already missing you!

We came together at Apollo, where you often worked; you loved it, with your being you taught here often. We added the harp, a large Persian carpet, flowers, the delicately powerful voices of Carolien van Straten and Elizabeth Kent, the loving strong presence of a chorus of friends whose hands you held during those months of preparation. John recited Whitman’s “Darest Thou Now, O Soul” from the manuscript that you printed; Steven Dambeck offered a personal and emotional eulogy to you; Colin Lamb gathered it all into a simple pure ritual. Beautifully seated in the audience, and yet so actively part of that play, were our most beloved Teacher and friends, probably the most presence an audience ever experienced. The wind came and added its touch onto the harp as words were spoken, adding such a mystical presence to our own efforts to be out of time.

The bells rang, we stood and walked, so slowly, we bowed to the earth and drove to the cemetery, just next to the orchard—such a delightful impression on a spring day—and yet the burial is such a final symbolic gesture for ending this passage on earth.

My last words to you, as I tossed a bit of dirt and a daffodil, “Here we are, my lovely butterfly, our love is forever.”

As your closest friend over the last ten years, I know that what mattered most to you was first, your own self-remembering, and second, reaching out to all our new friends from around the world to let them experience what our School is about. And that is why this article was written.

Adieu Peter, our love is forever,
Edith

“I know that we shall meet again in some divine eternity.”
Euripides

Linda Tullisso's toast at Apollo d'Oro after Peter's funeral:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson said, “Death closes all: but something ‘ere the end, some work of noble note, may yet be done, not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.” Let us toast to Peter, who often reminded us of our great good fortune.

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