

## Steven Swersky: A Tribute to a Friend and Colleague

*They say you can measure a man by the size footprints he leaves behind. If so, then Steve Swersky was a one fine, fine man who left behind a void so large that it sometimes seems impossible it will ever feel whole again.*

*I did not know him longer than a few years, but in that time, on a social basis and working with him on the SAJAC publication committee, I came to know him as a warm and gentle man, with fun in his eyes and humor in his heart.*

*This is not the New York Times, but to us that work on the Reporter, we have developed a warm and caring relationship, having worked as a group since the inception of the publication.*

*Steve joined our group and slotted in as if he was a founder member. He loved to write, and loved to laugh, and just a few days before he died, sent me a cutting from an Afrikaans newspaper with a colored photograph of two Afrikaners who had won 6th place in a braai competition and made the suggestion that such important news should be included in the next Reporter. He always looked on the brighter side.*

*He was a serious person who didn't take life seriously. He was the person everyone knew, everyone liked, and everyone respected.*

*Well Steve, we knew you. We respected you. We loved you. And we loved working with you. Damn it man, we miss you and we will always miss you. This group won't be quite the same again, but rest assured, your place in our hearts is secure and every meeting of the Reporter will remind us what a fine, fine man you were and why those footprints left a mark on us and on all the community.*

*Our heartfelt wishes to Sue, children and family always know that you are always in our thoughts and prayers.*

*The following are excerpts from a fax Steve sent home and gives a clear insight into Steve's thoughts as an immigrant in America.*

Dear Brian,

Howzit going? I hope things get easier.

This is a general letter from me to all those who I care about. Please forward it on to the following people and add an apology for not writing it individually. My idea is that one long informative letter is better than 500 post cards. (Here is a list of the people I really would like to get to read it.

Finally, please put up the opening seasons greetings on the notice board and make sure that everyone sees it. Special Hi! to Elias and the entire crew of HH.

Everything you wish your selves, tripled.

Love,  
Steve.

P.S. Right at this moment we are listening to a live broadcast of the Rolling Stones with Eric Clapton in Atlantic City!!!

Well, well, well. Five months gone, I'm a vagabond old/new tree with cautious roots digging slowly into American soil. So much new stuff is happening, and yet so much of the old is still preserved - carved into my soul. The days I spend certainly are different from my old life. It's like I've turned a new chapter in the serial of my

life. How different the new things to learn, to adapt to, to meld into and to cope with. The new set of responsibilities, the new things that are there lurking to worry about, the unbelievable range of delicacies suddenly now available, the new people to get to know, deepen with, to learn to love, and care about.

The shifting of targets and goals, the way to panelbeat our lives to reach a common purpose, for Sue and our kids and me to grow together, as a successfully-operating, nuclear, Californian, immigrant, closing-in-on-forty, seeking a better place, family.

The best way to take the look back is to carve up the day into minutes and examine what's changed and what hasn't.

What is really so nice about what I do is the immediacy of seeing a job well done. Lay a living room full of tiles and stand back and admire the new changes. The work satisfaction is absolutely fantastic! And I reckon I'm fitter and stronger physically than I have





ever been in my life, including judo years.

And my soul has had a chance to quiet down. So much time spent doing laborious things, like putting grout into a wall made of glass bricks, push in the grout, wipe with a sponge, re-wipe with a sponge, re-wipe with a sponge. It gives me so much time to go over my life, to ponder my weaknesses, examine for the umpteenth time my mistakes and my failings and try to slowly come to terms with them.

Time to walk through all the paths in the life-maze in front of me, to try on new roles, to accept the new challenges (real and imaginary before me), to "shadow-box" (Dad's terminology) through the vast number of things that might happen.

Time to walk through all my old relationships with you people I love dearly, to try and keep the images of how you each one look and sound like, how you've touched me with the kindness of yourself. No matter who I'm thinking of, there's one thing for sure, you're changing, moving on with life and while I am holding this picture of what you're like in my head, you've actually moved on. Especially the children. How fast they change!

Take our kids for example, American accents and Americanisms quickly creeping in (especially Russel), newschool, teachers, friends, and on and on. Suddenly they can read and play computers and write and get dressed on their own, and want, need, demand, fight for, offer love and affection. Complete people with their own set of ideas about what is right and what their entitlements are.

Isn't life unfair, stealing our minutes and throwing back maybes, perhaps, could've beens at us. But what about the new journey we're on? How lucky to have the opportunity to change, to do new things, to taste new life, to actually turn the page!! I'm glad we dived into this strange and vast aquarium called California.

Every immigrant I speak to has a whole bunch of different things to tell. Each one speaks about the toughness they had to experience, the trauma of separation, and financial fear they had to undergo. The tone of each one is tempered by the amount of time they've been out of the country. Each one has a different story about the stages of taming and settling-in dues one has to pay. But I have not met one person who has been here for any amount of time that would like to go back home.

America has an attitude which can only be felt and experienced when you come to feel and experience the vastness and power of this country. The incredible availability of art, sport, media, (MEDIA) wealth, and opportunity cannot be grasped by outsider (myself

INCLUDED). Relative to the USA, the rest of the world is a crumb And I mean from the grass roots level up.

So go on, ask. How can I get into the system, how can I get the lifeblood of humanity: CREDIT? You can't. Not in the short term. anycase. You can in the long term, by buying something for say \$10,000, paying \$9,900 cash and paying off the balance of \$100 over the next three years. Eventually you will be able to show that you've paid all your minimum balances.

But there's one exception. You buy a house.

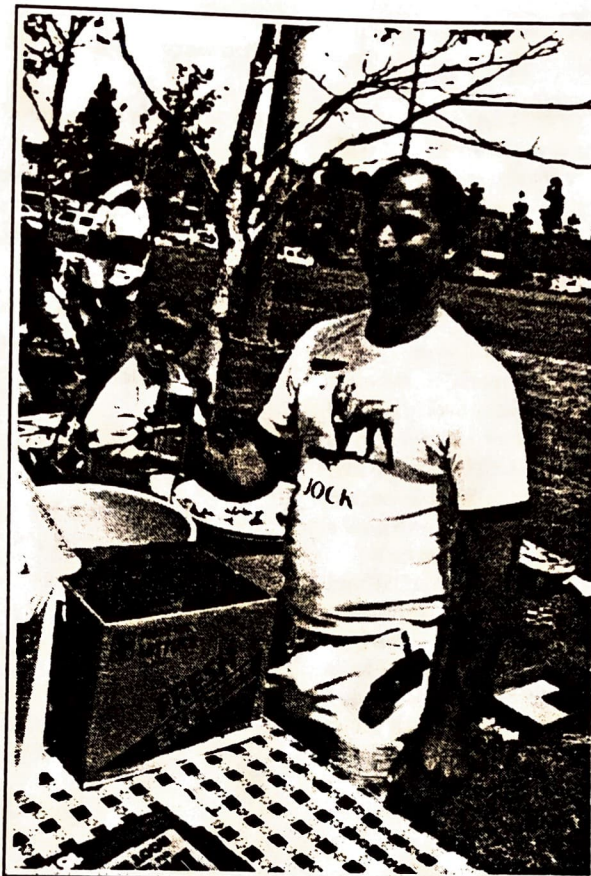
You can buy a house for any amount (and I mean ANY) regardless whether you have a job, or credit, or know anybody, provided you can come up with 20% of the price as a downpayment. The bank will give you a loan on the balance (and charge you higher interest if you haven't got credit). They figure if you default, they can recover their money quite easily by repossessing your home and then selling it. (Actually this is a major business angle here, lenders love to lend money and do repo's).

Anyway, once you've bought a house, you become a mensch. Every day you get hundreds of pamphlets in the mail, (the lender sold your name to a billion organizations) and people phone you all the time offering you all sorts of things, always at bargain prices. And coupons to get every conceivable thing at discount.

One totally amazing thing about the USA is the amount of stuff that people actually DO. And by that I mean that somehow every one I meet

is doing courses, going on holiday, working night shift, while writing their memoirs etc. It's a CONVENIENCE SOCIETY. Everything is so convenient: you have drive-through banks, fast food joints, lightening printers, flash dentists. So... you drive to the ATM and get your balance, deposit your checks (ha), pocket the cash, photostat a 60-page manuscript, have a tooth capped (yes SAME DAY tooth capping is the least you can expect) pick up a set of prescription specs at Vons (equals Pik 'n' Pay), rush in and eat your Chicken McNuggets while you wash away the days grime in your shower (never bath; too costly in terms of time), and freshen up for your class in Remnants of Medieval Swiss Witch Fingernail Filings, held at the local college. People DO IT!

The South African San Diegans have developed a very strong web of inter-personal relationships, helping and taking care of each other, inviting for dinner and barbecues (braai is no longer a word), Yom Tov and Pesach. Friends taking the role of what family used to do. They are very supportive from the viewpoint of introductions and socialization.





Of course with all this goes the usual bitchiness and skinnering. You could say that the South African community here is a microcosmic Peyton Place that has somehow developed into a cocoon within the California forest. Most people I've met have a set of loyal S.A. friends, a whole host of see-you-every-second-month/at-a-function buddies, and some American acquaintances (whom they are very proud to boast about as their real American friends).

I guess we'll always be immigrants. It's for our kids to make the real transition.

You get to cross the line between being wet-behind-the-ears immigrant to be a know-it-all rooted citizen when you understand baseball, football and basketball. Do you know that Maro Davis is 34 and 16? Nor do I. That makes us both Neanderthals. Do you still hunt wild animals with a spear for dinner?

What else can I tell you? It's hard, but for me, it's been very gratifying and certainly a mind-broadening experience. We miss you all. We want you here with us. We want you to try this new hat with us, walk hand-in-hand through this jungle of tangle vines and guileful shrubs.

But like Judith Viorst says, you have friends in spots. You touch them for a while and then they stretch out far away. Love for them you will always have, and when you have the supreme luxury of seeing them for a day, or week, or two, it's fantastic. But there is always a plane to catch....

So it's now Steven Swaz signing off.

Keep Well,

and,

BEST LOVE

Dear Mom,

Two nights ago my friend Steve Swersky had a heart attack in his sleep and died. He shouldn't have had a heart attack at all. He was young and fit and loved life. But if he did have a heart attack, it should not have been fatal.

He should not be dead! Hurt... maybe or sick, something with hope, something that makes you fall on your knees and promise God that if he is returned to health we will never complain about anything again! But that's not how it is. It's over, he's gone with no warning and no good-byes.

You know Steve, Mom. You met him when you came to visit us. He is the one Daddy was so crazy about. The one with the weird and wonderful sense of humor. The one whose articles I used to send you, the one who had a daughter four weeks ago. He's the one that David used to phone at 11 p.m. to talk for hours about LIFE. He's the one that built the beautiful sun-room onto our house.

Mom, you're older and wiser than me and you've seen more of life — and death. Can you find some rationale for this? I need a place where I can go, even just for a minute, and say: "It's okay that this happened because..." Because he has two young sons? Because he and his wife Sue, truly loved each other? Because he really had his life together in so many ways? — WHY???? It isn't fair, it isn't right. Not Steve. He was so good, Mom, so kind, so wise. He had so much to give. He reminded me of John Lennon in a way. He should have stayed around a long time to share his mind with us.

Of course the kids are devastated. It's their first brush with mortality. "If this could happen to Steve," they asked, "could it happen to me, to Daddy?" We try to reassure them... but we are not very convincing.

I must stop now and go to prayers. Like last night, there will — no doubt — be cars all around the block. We do have a wonderfully supportive community here and there are lots of friends who will try to fill the empty spaces... But, pray for them Mom, and, if you can make more sense of this than I can, write to me, or call.

Love to everyone.

Enjoy each other every day you have together.

I love you.

Love Janice

*The Parents Association of the San Diego Jewish Academy would like to set up a fund in Steve's memory. With a recommendation from his family we will purchase something for the school that would be meaningful to Steve and will benefit all of our children.*

*He installed the wonderful playground equipment our children enjoy each day. This playground is truly symbolic of his free spirit, and devotion to his children. This past Succoth he generously gave of his energy and time to assist the Junior High in building their Succah. He performed a wonderful Mitzvah.*

*Contributions can be made to the SDJA - PA - Steve Swersky Fund and an acknowledgment will be made to Sue and the Children*