

I am thinking about our loss today. We have lost not just Bobby, but so much more. The Chassells were all good, good friends to us, but also to everyone, creating fun and community all down through the years and far into the future.

The Chassells were some of the first people we met in the Berkshires when we moved to Stockbridge from California in 1960, when I was 12. Bobby began right away to introduce us to the fun of winter, including skiing, skating, tobogganing, snowshoeing and igloos. There always seemed to be plenty of equipment to go around, and Joe and Margo served maple syrup apres ski. They invited us to walk through their woods and help keep the fire burning at the giant cauldron, with its hoses running through the woods to each maple tree. Needless to say, we have been making maple syrup ever since. And my mother Margaret began her collection of possibly every size of ski and skate.

My father, Gordon was also inspired by the Chassells' industry and imagination, though in many ways, he couldn't keep up. Their garden was productive and I think mostly weed free, whereas, Dad has been known to plant the asparagus upside down. They kept sheep and goats, wove rugs and Margo and Karen shared their arts and crafts with their friends, and with the girl scouts.

Joe had a large collection of classical sheet music in many parts, including for the B-flat trumpet, if I remember correctly. He started a music group, which my father continued many years after Joe was gone. When I visited from college, they would drag out the music I knew, and Joe and I would take a part together, he on his alto flute and me on my tenor recorder. I was kind of a brat, and would occasionally tip over the music stand with my bare toes. No one seemed to mind. It was still "An elegant entertainment", as my father would say.

Bobby was the first person to introduce me to Monument Mountain, and Rosalie Butler's dedication carved into a rock near the top. She says she is gifting the mountain "for the free enjoyment of the people of Berkshire, for all time" or something like that. And that was right in line with Bobby's thinking, as well. The center of Stockbridge in the summer, was the Chassell's pond. Everyone was always welcome, with nothing asked in return. I was often surprised by the reach of their friendships, and the people I met there. You could also meet their friends living in their many small, medium and large out-buildings. Joe and Margo themselves slept in the lean-to nearest the house, I think possibly in winter too, though that may be a myth. The cowbell at the front door, Bobby interrupting his computer work (or not) to take a swim, the birds and bears at the kitchen window, Margo's Dutch Apple Cake, all are vivid in my memory, still.

Bob was brilliant, selfless and impractical. He understood very early the possibilities of the World Wide Web for enriching people's lives and for making money, but instead of devoting his considerable talent to building a company or working for a university, he decided to create an online community by writing computer instruction books and giving them away for free, and by acting as a founding director of the Free Software Foundation to maintain free access to all people and resist the monetization of intellectual property. Someone else will have to tell you more about Bob's work, as it was above my head, but suffice it to say, he was respected, admired and loved in near and faraway places, as a steward of ideas.

Though the house is long gone and the pond belongs to someone else, the Chassells are still sharing their beautiful land with us. They gifted to the Nature Conservancy a large portion of their woods, including the babbling stream where the lean-to used to be, and where Judd stayed the summer that the tornado visited, twisting down the stream bed right in front of him. How rare is that?! And how rare are friends like these, whose gifts come down to us through the ages. This Memorial Day, my brothers and sisters and I took Margaret to fulfill my Dad's last wish, to have his ashes scattered by that stream.

Margaret wanted to buy the Chassell's property when Margot died, and run it as a free artists' colony. The rest of us decided it was too expensive and impractical, so we missed the chance. But as usual, I have come to feel that she was right.

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