

A Farewell to Paul Zindel

John H. Bushman

It was a Saturday noon in early March in 1995 in Lawrence, Kansas, when I said: "Let us give a warm welcome to Paul Zindel." At that moment everyone stood up and applauded for 30 or 45 seconds. The man went to the microphone with a very broad smile on his face and began to speak – a speech that lasted 55 minutes. By the time he was finished, the audience experienced a roller coaster ride: sometimes silent, sometimes laughing so hard they had tears in their eyes, but always enthralled with what they were hearing. Paul Zindel had come to the heartland – Lawrence, Kansas – and treated the 300 or so people in attendance as if they were special people. That was the man, Paul Zindel. He didn't need to come to the Conference on Writing and Literature in Lawrence, Kansas, but he did. That was the man, Paul Zindel. His presence commanded respect from all who were present, even those who were nationally known speakers also presenting at the Conference – Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Tom Romano, and Sara Holbrook. All were experiencing a warm, thoughtful, and sometimes irreverent talk.

Young and old alike lost a giant of a man and a giant of a writer for young people. He certainly can be given the honor of "one of the founding fathers of young adult literature." To this day, *The Pigman* (1968) is still offered as curriculum reading in classrooms across the nation, as well as supplemental reading outside the curriculum. His writing left a legacy that will not soon be duplicated.

Paul said, when asked about writing:

I love a good story. I try to feel strongly about what I write. Better yet, I try to write about only those things that make me cry or laugh acutely. I try to be honest. I try to be daring and human. I trust my instincts. I ignore critics, usually. I believe the perfect story is a dream. I believe writing is a complex, problem-solving adventure – a process Nature has given to all of us.

Indeed.

John H Bushman is a Professor of English Education at the University of Kansas and Director of The Writing Conference, Inc.