

Saying Goodbye to Paul Zindel

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Whether or not we have read a book by Paul Zindel, all of us working with contemporary young adult literature have been influenced by his work. Both Robert Cormier and M. E. Kerr have said that when they first considered writing for teenagers, they read Zindel's 1968 *The Pigman* to decide if the genre were worthy of their best efforts. Obviously, Zindel's book convinced them. Later writers, pondering the same question, could be convinced not only by Zindel's work, but also by that of Cormier and Kerr.

Paul was generous with both his time and his talents. Back in 1984 he came to Arizona State University to speak to our students and to participate in one of the early humor conferences. HarperCollins paid his travel expenses, but he donated his time and energy. When he learned I was teaching children's literature, he bemoaned how often his young son, David, had forced him to read Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. He philosophically confided that the gods were getting even with him because he had harbored suspicions that picture books were all pretty much the same; it was just marketing and luck that made the difference. His son's attachment to *Where the Wild Things Are* convinced him otherwise.

Ten years later in 1994, Paul again generously donated his time and talents by coming to the International Society for Humor Studies Conference held at Ithaca College in upstate New York. He brought David with him, who by now was a

tall, handsome college student with dark curly hair and a wonderful twinkle in his eyes. After Paul participated on the opening panel with Joan Bauer, Jerry and Helen Weiss, Paula Danziger, and Bruce Coville, Paul and David stayed throughout the conference. They attended sessions, took notes, ate in the cafeteria, and laughed along with everyone else. Observing what Paul was giving to his son made me think about what Paul's books have given to all of our sons and daughters. He has been more than a Mr. Pignati for a whole generation of kids.

Looking back on that week of seeing how Paul respected and interacted with David, I can understand why David would assume that his father's interests were the same as his and why he would therefore tell a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that his father's "heart was always in the theater," even though the books were what provided the "steadier income." Making money from writing YA books is, in itself, a new high for our field, but still there are a lot of us who, in spite of what David thinks, are going to keep believing that Paul had a heart so big that there was plenty of room in it for both his young adult books and his Broadway plays.

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