

Paul T. P. Wong: A Friend and Colleague

Judith Toronchuk, Ph.D.¹

Paul Wong has been both my colleague and my friend since 1994 when he came to Trinity Western to found the graduate program in Counselling Psychology. After several years of teaching biology and psychology part-time, I had begun teaching full-time in 1991. I well remember visiting with him in his office in the dark and somewhat dingy, former library building, where he began the counselling program. Right from those early days, we had enjoyable, heartfelt conversations which ranged beyond psychology and university policy. I often noticed an open Bible on his desk, and he often spoke of his faith—something which gave me hope in the university enterprise. Eventually, I participated as supervisor or second reader for several of the graduate students in his program. These encounters with Paul both encouraged and challenged me to go beyond my own aspirations.

The start of the counselling program at TWU required the creation of a human ethics committee, which Paul initiated and chaired at first. He managed to talk me, somewhat reluctantly, into joining the committee and eventually, with his forceful encouragement I followed as chair just at the time when the Canadian research bodies were setting up new standards. The policy papers that Paul had written up in his first year became an invaluable starting point as I wrote the university's guidelines under the new regulations. It was obvious to me that ethical action was an important component undergirding Paul's way of being, and he always stressed a servant approach to leadership.

In 2004, Paul was planning the second INPM conference at the same time that I as program chair was planning the annual meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation. The ASA is a group of Christians who are actively involved in scientific teaching and research. The theme in 2004 was neuroscience, and I had already lined up several neuroscience people as plenary speakers. Paul realized that our conferences occurred back to back and came up with the plan to hold a joint event on finding meaning in suffering on the day between the two conferences. Together, we submitted a successful grant proposal for funding from the John Templeton Foundation. I believe the joint program that we held that day was quite unique in that it included several prominent neuroscience researchers who had struggled to make sense of the vicarious suffering they experienced due to dementia, pain, and paralysis afflicting their loved ones. It was a unique sharing of personal pain accompanied by hope and faith. This theme of meaning in the midst of suffering challenged both research and counselling participants and has been an ongoing theme in Paul's own work.

Yet there was also a light-hearted side to the serious work of forging a friendship with a colleague. One year I found a jello mold from which, with suitable mixing of peach and lime jello and milk, a life-size opaque gelatine brain could be fashioned and with a large knife used to demonstrate the orientation of brain sections—horizontal, sagittal, coronal in my class. One morning a pale grey brain sat on a table just outside my office door, glistening from the oil used to grease the mold. Walking past my office, Paul came upon my teaching aid and began to loudly berate it. “I’ve never seen such a poor excuse for a plastic brain model. That looks so phoney!” he began. Slightly embarrassed, I tried to explain, “Paul, it’s not plastic...” Paul was known to be very emphatic and direct in his critiques and protested, “Of course it’s plastic. Anyone can see that it’s plastic. I’ve never seen such a phoney brain model in my life.” And with that, he

¹ Psychology Department (Retired), Trinity Western University

grabbed the brain and tried to pick it up. As his hand wrapped around the cold, slippery gelatine, he let out a strange shrieking noise. “I tried to tell you it’s not plastic,” I said. “That’s horrible! What a shock! You’ve shocked my whole being,” he exclaimed. Hours later, Paul came by again and said, “I couldn’t eat my lunch today because of your awful brain.” And we were able to laugh together.

One year my family held a surprise birthday party for me and invited, among other people, several of my colleagues from the university. Paul was the only colleague who took the time to come to the party, and on that day, I was moved to realize that Paul was really more than a colleague; he was truly my friend. And so, I wish to also honour him on his 80th birthday as my friend, from whom I have learned much and with whom I have also laughed.