In Memorium

Theoharis K. Seghorn
1939–2001

It was spring of 1980, and I found myself searching for the Massachusetts Treatment Center. I was heading for a job interview. I eventually arrived at a compound of ugly, gray, century-old buildings decorated with razor wire. I walked up a narrow, concrete staircase on the side of Warren Hall and was ushered into a tiny office and introduced to Dr Seghorn. Theo bid me sit in the only chair in an office piled from floor to ceiling with books, files, articles, and miscellaneous papers. So too, Theo’s desk. Fortunately, he was a big man, otherwise I might not have seen him behind 3 ft columns of papers and books stacked on his desk. Theo smiled, that 180 degree smile that was his trademark, and asked if he could help me. I replied that I was there for a job interview. Theo apologized and pulled a CV out of a stack of papers and began perusing it. When Theo asked how I liked Boston College, I explained that I went to school in Chicago. Theo returned to the stack, located my CV, and began looking it over when he received a phone call. After 15 or 20 min he hung up and said to me, without a trace of guile, “What do you think I should do?” All I could think of at the time was “Is this some sort of stress interview?” From that rather inauspicious encounter, began a 20-year long loving friendship.

This memorial tribute to Theo’s life is, admittedly, a bit unorthodox. Rather than the more conventional, clinical, approach to writing an obituary, I have tried to provide a more personal reflection of Theo’s life and, most important, his humanity.

Theo and his younger brother Karl were born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. Their father, a baker by trade, died from tuberculosis in his early thirties, and both boys were raised fatherless. Their mother was a seamstress who worked in a sweatshop to support her two sons, and the family lived in a cold water flat. Theo always excelled in school. Although he always talked about his “PS” roots (He went to Public School 9), they were short-lived. He was selected as a gifted student and sent to John Marshall Junior High School, where he again distinguished himself as highly gifted. Theo groused to his friend Bob Moss about being forced to learn
Greek after a hard day at John Marshall, and Bob would commiserate, saying he was forced to learn Hebrew. Once again, Theo was screened out, this time to attend the highly selective Stuyvesant High School, which accepted only the top students in New York City. During his years at John Marshall and Stuyvesant, Theo took the St. John’s Place bus across town. I used to tease him about being one of the earliest kids to be “bused in.” Theo was part of a clique of a dozen or so kids in those years. He remained close friends with many of them throughout his adult life. After high school, Theo went on to Columbia University. His tenure at Columbia was short-lived, however. He met Marge, his first wife, and they moved to Boston. Theo completed his undergraduate degree at Boston University, and eventually earned his doctorate at Boston University in 1970 under the tutelage of his close friend and mentor, Murray Cohen. Theo’s first “exposure” to sex offenders was as a predoctoral intern at the Massachusetts Treatment Center in 1965. Theo returned to the Treatment Center as Clinical Director in 1977 and remained at the Treatment Center in various capacities, including Assistant Administrator. Carol Ball came to the Treatment Center in November of 1983, and the rest, as we say, is history. Carol and Theo spent the next 17 years together, in what can only be described as a storybook romance. Theo left the Treatment Center in 1985 to found New England Forensic Associates.

Theo’s contributions to the field of sex offender treatment are numerous. His quiet, unassuming leadership impacted many facets of our field, from his unyielding, principled captaincy of the Treatment Center during its most turbulent years to his contributions as a member of the United States Surgeon General’s Task Force on Violence in America, his Editorship of the ATSA Forum, his contributions to the Board of Directors of MATSA, and his lifelong, steadfast devotion to mentoring young clinicians and researchers. At the Treatment Center, Theo’s greatest gift was giving wise counsel and comfort to new therapists. In his comments to ATSA’s Board of Directors, recommending that ATSA honor the memory of Theo, Ray Knight observed, “He easily accepted newcomers to the field under his protective wing. He always managed to give feedback without appearing critical. He relished sharing his vast knowledge and experience. He could always be depended on to give insightful comments on a manuscript or a report, and we always came away from our encounters with him, profiting from his advice and counsel.” His devotion to mentoring was evident years later when he spent countless hours helping others on ATSA's listserv.

Theo was instrumental in birthing and fathering the research program at the Treatment Center. In 1979, when the number of individuals doing credible research on sexual aggression could be counted on one hand, it was Theo’s vision to develop a research department at the Treatment Center. Theo not only was our most loyal advocate but a fully and actively contributing member of our research team. He possessed a vast trove of clinical experience from which to draw, as well as an uncommonly clear vision of the need to translate clinical experience into the