

Tribute delivered by Michael McCall to George Penniman Barker's family, colleagues & lifelong friends

***Friday, June 3, 2016
Howard County Conservancy***

I am Michael McCall and I worked for George. This is a personal, true tale spanning 34 years; yet, it occurred in two beautiful bookends.

The story begins in 1982. I was a 25-year old Rochester, Minnesota boy, with a Bachelors Degree from a Minnesota state school. In a highly unlikely and remarkable circumstance, I was one of the first employees hired by Jim Rouse for The Enterprise Development Company.

My new direct boss was Vice President George P. Barker, a 42-year old Princeton grad and Columbia University educated lawyer. What a study in contrasts.

I did not know much about anything. Worse, I did not know that I did not know; and, to put kerosene on my Midwestern fire, I had always been rewarded for taking direct action. In my wife's phraseology, I was a "Real Piece of Work." I guess George drew the short straw.

George was in every way my superior. George came from an elite Eastern pedigree. He was an experienced, sophisticated, successful attorney, who had been rewarded for cautious deliberations; and like any great real estate attorney, for highly nuanced transactions.

George more than tolerated me. He deftly dealt with me in the manner of Socrates, always asking me questions with prosecutorial precision, though with the compassion of a nurse, like his bride, Anne, whom he loved so much. George somehow survived me, and because of his tolerance, tutoring and mentorship, I began to thrive at Enterprise.

Fast-forward a quarter century to 2011. In another fortuitous twist of fate, my son, Evan, had become George and Anne's personal "Creative" tutor at the Apple Store. George and Anne were always traveling, and when they returned home, they always needed help.

Evan certainly had job security. In fact, when Evan relocated to New York, George and Anne would stop by to see him at the Grand Central Apple Store. Evan and George had a wonderful rapport and it was a joy for Barbara and I to watch our son's relationship with my former boss.

In the summer of 2011, the Howard County Design Advisory Panel had taken Columbia Association to task for its proposed Symphony Woods park design. One day Evan mentioned that Mr. Barker was coming in to the Apple Store to work with him, and I decided to make sure to stop by, as well.

At the end of George's session with Evan, I shared with him my agreement with the Design Advisory Panel's concern about the proposed park design for Symphony Woods, and how I viewed Symphony Woods as the very heart of Jim Rouse's legacy in Columbia.

George proactively offered his support and said: "Let's go see Ken Ulman," the County Executive of Howard County.

Just think of all the millions of things George could have said. He could have said that he was traveling a great deal (which he was) and did not have the time to help, or that the designers of Columbia Association's park plan were old friends of his (which they were) and that they are good people (which they are). George could have said a million things, but what he said was, "Let's go see Ken Ulman."

The simple fact is this: The Inner Arbor Trust and the plan for Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods would not exist, and the Chrysalis would not be under construction, if it were not for George Penniman Barker.

George supported Merriweather Park every step of the way, publicly testifying and privately counseling me throughout.

This is the essence of my true-life adventure with George P. Barker. He was a great man who forever changed me, but far more importantly, George changed the course of Columbia, the garden for growing people, that he loved so much.

Thank you, George. We will love you forever.