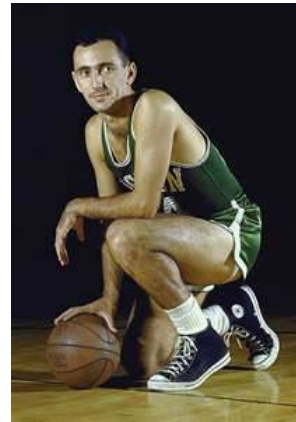


The wrong perspective

You probably know very little about Bob Cousy, especially if you're under the age of 40 or so.

He was an NCAA All-American basketball player three times in the late 1940s and a member of the Boston Celtics from 1950 to 1963. Those of us who saw him play considered him a wizard with his behind-the-back and no-look passes. During his first 11 seasons, he led the league in assists eight straight times and introduced a new blend of ball-handling and passing skills that drew comparisons to Houdini -- and he essentially invented the point guard position inherited by the likes of Magic Johnson and Steve Nash. In Boston, he is still introduced today as "Mr. Basketball."



Cousy was an NBA All-Star 13 times, Most Valuable Player in 1957, and field general for six NBA championships. He was named to the league's 25th and 35th Anniversary teams and in 1996 to its 50th Anniversary All-Time Team, one of only four players selected for all three teams.

So you would think Bob Cousy had few regrets about his playing days . . .

* * * * *

As a teenager, I admired Cousy as a player, even though his Celtics always seemed to whip my beloved Lakers (first in my home town Minneapolis and then when they moved to Los Angeles). But I never really knew much about him as a person and never gave him much thought over the years.

Then, during the holidays, I found myself reading Frank Deford's memoir *Over Time: My Life as a Sportswriter*. Deford writes at length about the racism that abounded in professional sports during the '50s and '60s, and then describes an interview in Cousy's home at the turn of the century:

"Now, Cousy had been an absolute prince among men to his African-American teammates. He was one player who didn't have to be taught anything about brotherhood. Indeed, in 1950, when Chuck Cooper, the first black player to be drafted by the NBA, joined the Celtics, Cousy immediately befriended him and looked after him. When the Celtics were playing an exhibition in North Carolina and Cooper wasn't permitted to stay in the team hotel, he decided to return to Boston. So Cousy, who was just a rookie himself, declared that he would skip the game, too, and, instead, he rode the train north with Cooper.

"And so we were talking about that time, when Bob suddenly stopped. Then he began to cry, softly at first, and then with really hard, deep sobs. 'Bob?' I said. 'Bob, what is it?'

“He finally got hold of himself, but the tears were still coming some when he said, ‘It’s just that I should have done so much more. I’ve never forgotten that. I should have done more.’ He who had done so much.”

But this isn’t an essay about how you and I should do more with whatever time we have left. We all know that. That’s why we’ve embraced the world of social enterprise.

No, this is just the opposite. This is a plea for you to remember what you *have* accomplished, not what you’ve failed to do. But time recedes, I know -- and it’s difficult to fully comprehend your impact on others, especially as you grow older and the years begin to slip away . . .

My friend John Williamson died December 31, 1990, at the age of 48.

He earned a doctorate in education and organizational development from Harvard, worked as a counselor in the Pacific Northwest, and quickly established a national reputation as a leader in the field of educational reform. He eventually became a policy analyst for the Rand Corporation, director of planning and policy development for the National Institute of Education, and in 1980 Senior Vice President of Wilson Learning Corporation in Minneapolis. For the next ten years he led the company’s worldwide marketing, product direction and new business development (today’s client list has grown to more than 2,000 organizations in 45 countries). He was an articulate spokesperson for lifelong learning, human potential and new educational technologies, and he mingled freely with the world’s foremost thinkers about change and leadership.

I served with John for years on the Board of Directors for the Montessori School our daughters attended in Minneapolis. My youngest daughter Jessica and his daughter Erin were classmates and close friends. John rarely spoke about his life before Wilson Learning, and I had only a dim understanding of his national stature.

Then came the diagnosis. We all thought it was Bell’s Palsy, a weakness or paralysis of the muscles on one side of the face. It can appear quite suddenly, sometimes overnight, as it did with John, but the effects typically resolve completely in a matter of months.

That didn’t happen with John. It wasn’t Bell’s Palsy. It was cancer.

John faced his diagnosis with the same courage he had nurtured in others with his counseling and with his abiding interest in the world around him. He had once backpacked in Africa and befriended the Maasai -- and the last time I saw him, in his bed at a hospice, all he wanted to talk about was my trip to Russia: How was it over there? What were the people like? How were they adapting to *perestroika*?

What remains with me today, though, more than ever as I age, is the gift John received from a group of people he had touched during his life, people from all over the country, many he hadn’t heard from in years.

It arrived at his bedside, a simple note and a large glass bowl about a foot wide and a foot deep. Inside the bowl were tiny slips of paper, each bearing the name of a person who wanted John to know he’d made a difference in his or her life. The note reminded him that all he needed to do if he ever thought he hadn’t done enough was reach into the bowl . . .

I'm sure John wished he had done even more to help others. We all do. But sometimes it takes a very long time to see the fruits of our labors. Often we *never* see them. Yet the seeds we plant *do* sprout, even in our absence . . .

Do not forget that.

Please.

Do not forget.

You *have* made a difference. Don't fret about your mistakes or oversights. Accept them. Recognize them. Learn from them.

And remember that the people you once aided are now assisting others who in turn will be there with a helping hand years from now, long after you're gone.

John Williamson's friends made sure he knew that before he left us . . .

I want to make sure *you* remember it, every day.