

Mourning, and Celebrating, a Radical

Wayne King

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A thousand friends and relatives of Abbie Hoffman held a requiem for a radical today, vowing to keep alive the spirit of a man who proved that protest could be fun but who died, uncharacteristically alone and silent, by his own hand.

Only two of Mr. Hoffman's best-known radical compatriots from the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial showed up, with one, David Dellinger, railing that the report of his suicide was a conspiracy and a lie, and the other, Jerry Rubin, co-founder with Mr. Hoffman of the quintessential 60's protest group, the Yippies, predicting that the Hoffman spirit would be reborn in the 1990's but in a coat and tie.

Indeed, most of the mourners who attended the formal memorial at Temple Emanuel here were more yuppie than yippie and there were more rep ties than ripped jeans among the crowd. A Song About a Giant

It was far from a traditional ceremony, with the mourners taking to the streets in a symbolic peace march and singing along with the political Pied Piper Pete Seeger. Mr. Seeger, who did wear his own trademark jeans, sweater and fisherman's cap, plucked the banjo and cavorted about the dais singing "Abiyoyo," his famous children's song about the conquering of a giant.

And Bill Walton, the radical Celtic of basketball renown, told of a puckish Abbie, then underground evading a cocaine charge in the 70's, leaping from the shadows on a New York street to give him an impromptu basketball lesson after a loss to the Knicks.

"Abbie was not a fugitive from justice," said Mr. Walton. "Justice was a fugitive from him."

On a more traditional note, Rabbi Norman Mendell said in his eulogy that Mr. Hoffman's long history of protest, antic though much of it had been, was "in the Jewish prophetic tradition, which is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

But the Rabbi also quoted one of Mr. Hoffman's favorite sayings: "Sacred cows make the tastiest hamburger."

The memorial ceremony here, at the temple that Mr. Hoffman attended as a child, was organized by family and friends of Mr. Hoffman after his body was found last Wednesday in his apartment in a converted turkey coop near New Hope, Pa. Debate Over Suicide

On Tuesday a coroner ruled that Mr. Hoffman, who was 52 years old, died of a massive overdose of phenobarbital, about 150 tablets, taken in combination with alcohol. It was, said the coroner, Thomas J. Rosko, clearly a suicide.

Mr. Hoffman had a long history of manic-depressive illness, but the condition was not generally known, except to family and close friends.

According to Al Giordano, who said he had been working on a biography with Mr. Hoffman for the last nine months, Mr. Hoffman had been preparing his own book on the illness and had extensive notes.

"He had been working on this for years," said Mr. Giordano, who attended the memorial service. "He was a very serious student of the disease, and he had beside his bedside 15 or 20 books on the subject. He had about 200 handwritten pages of his own notes on his moods. He fought that condition intelligently and courageously for many, many years." Doubts of Family and Friends

Despite reports of the illness, which is characterized by periods of hyperactivity and mania alternating with often-suicidal depression, some of Mr. Hoffman's friends refused, even after the medical examiner's report, to accept that the death was a suicide.

Among them were his brother, Jack, who maintained that Abbie Hoffman often gulped down medication, washing it down with a belt of whiskey, and suggested he had probably taken the overdose accidentally.

The coroner, in an interview, ruled out that possibility Tuesday on the ground that such a large amount of pills could not be ingested accidentally.

Among the more vocal doubters at the service today was Mr. Dillinger, who said, "I don't believe for one moment the suicide thing." He said he had been in fairly frequent touch with Mr. Hoffman, who had "numerous plans for the future."

He also said he did not understand the absence of a suicide note.

But Mr. Rubin suggested that the absence of a note might even be consistent with Mr. Hoffman's philosophy of "perhaps making a statement and stirring discussion through the mystery."

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