

A memory of Roger Hilsman, soldier, statesman, scholar

Written by Administrator

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Tiny Town, USA – I see that Roger Hilsman died. A friend passed along his obituary, published in the Ithaca Journal today, March 4. I'd recently seen an image of him posted on his daughter's Facebook page. Today I learn he is gone a good week already.

I met Roger Hilsman in 1987 when he and wife, Eleanor, allowed me to stay in their capacious apartment on 114th and Riverside, while I looked for work. I was seeing their daughter, Sarah, who I met in Tiny Town when she worked at a coffee shop called Heart's Content, now an "artisan" bong shop.

Roger Hilsman was a tough guy and a true American hero. His Wiki entry is an eye-opener. But I remember Roger for something he said to me at dinner in Old Lyme, CT., where he had some property and a couple nice cottages. His darling wife Eleanor and I were talking about how to measure water when cooking rice. She said she went by the first crinkle in her digit, placing a finger into the pot and measuring from the level of the rice setting in the water. "That's a good Rule of Thumb," I quipped rather lamely—but I will say, rather quickly!

Roger was taking stock of me and I don't think the first impressions he was getting were very good. But Mrs. Hilsman laughed. She liked word play. Then it got reeeal quiet. Roger stabbed at his veggies with a fork and said, in that stentorian voice of his, without looking up: "I had an uncle who once told me that puns are the stench from a rotting brain." He didn't look up at me. He was concentrating on his food. He didn't need to look up: Roger hit his target. I was smarter back then and kept my mouth shut.

It was a helluva way to meet someone's dad, and I was already plenty intimidated by his

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military career, his political credentials, his academic credentials and his daughter. I graduated college late, held no job and was, basically, a bum.

Still, I had an inward fondness for cranky authority figures, especially veterans, and I didn't let his comment stop me from saying any number of inane things in his presence that weekend. I grudgingly won his favor, as I recall, by getting a tree stump out his driveway that he'd been having trouble with. I dug it out and chained it and Roger hauled it up with a tractor. I was a man, after all.

Here's his Wiki entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Hilsman ... Curiously, he died on Feb. 23, the same date that my brother was killed in Vietnam. More curiously: It was at Mr. Hilsman's Old Lyme retreat where I first learned about Lyme disease, identified by a doctor in that area whom he knew. I didn't think much on that because I was going to live in New York City and I didn't walk in the woods back then.

Things change.

Three years ago, I contracted Lyme disease and it really took me out of my game. On fretful, superstitious days, I wonder if it was somehow karmic.

– Franklin Crawford, *stinking up the place for longer than expected*