

Samuel Levin

Submitted by [Andrew Bell](#) on Friday, 5 November 2010



Little wavelets hurry up the beach,

Collapse in nerveless heaps

And placidly expire.

Enervated drifts reach poise

And a faint rim

Contains the ocean.

The poet behind these words, Samuel R. Levin, distinguished professor Emeritus of English and Linguistics at the City University of New York Graduate Center, died today.

One of his greatest contributions to the English language was his exquisite book *Shades of Meaning*. In it he exposes the verbiage that has invested our writing and speaking. The book is written as a textbook to help us avoid the common faux pas and junk speak in our writing and in our public speaking. Widely embraced scholastically, his book has become a fundamental part of many collegiate English departments, and a tremendous aide to anyone interested in speaking English articulately and accurately.

I met Samuel Levin, the poet behind these beautiful words, almost a year ago. My grandmother Mary Galvani moved to The 80th Street Residence, a memory care facility located in New York City. While the adjustment for her from an unattended apartment to a constantly watched residence was extremely difficult, at the age of 95 years old, she not only adapted seamlessly, but she once again fell in love. Luckily for us, it was with Samuel Levin. When I met Sam, I found a man who was kind, sharp, but most of all incredibly fun and gregarious. He was a person whom I immediately wanted to befriend, and to my great fortune, eventually did.

While clearly a scholar, Sam was first and foremost a poet, and he loved reciting whatever he could remember. This included the poem listed above, Lycidas by Milton, and a couple of other poems that depending on the day he might recollect. I can tell you that quite frankly I probably heard these select poems over a hundred times, in the dozens of visits that I made to The 80th Street Residence. Yet, as a consequence of his resounding and triumphant voice, and a personality unlike any I've ever come across, Sam always made it feel like this was the first time you had ever heard these poems and you literally clung to his every word.

He'd always say when you talked to him, to study poetry, as you just might not know when it would come in handy. I realize now that, as his mind began to fail him, these poems that he had remembered were his weapon against this cruel disease. Sam, no matter what, wanted it known, that his love for language and humanity would never be defeated, and his poems and words helped carry his message. Today, I've been crestfallen after receiving the news that at the age of 93, Samuel Levin has died, but I comfort myself in knowing that I met this man at the end of his life, and far from defeated, he was energetic, witty and loving. If a man is to be judged by how he handles the end of his life, Sam handled it with grace and proved that he could not and would not be defeated. The words Sam cherished more than any other, fittingly describe the sadness that I feel at his passing and perfectly sum up Sam to me. Sam, buddy, you were right, sometimes only a poem can express what we're feeling.

For Lycidas is dead.....

Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:

Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew

Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.

He must not flote upon his watery bear

Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,

Without the meed of som melodious tear.

Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well....

Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.