

A Púca of Peace

IN ONE OF THE QUIRKIEST ROLES of his storied career, Jimmy Stewart played a gentle soul named Elwood P. Dowd who was convinced that a prodigiously sized rabbit was his constant companion. He happily tried to convince his fellow travelers though our mundane world that his friend, Harvey, was right there in front of them, although no one else seemed to be able to see the giant rabbit. And many of them doubted Dowd's mental judgment, as a result. Mary Chase, who wrote the original play *Harvey*, modeled Elwood P. Dowd's invisible companion on a type of legendary shape-shifting trickster spirit from Celtic mythology called a púca (pronounced "pooka").

Ron Moffatt, the former president of NAFSA who passed away recently reminds me just a little of Stewart's Dowd. Although

Ron certainly did not share Dowd's preternaturally bemused view of the world, he too, was a gentle man haunted by a púca.

But where Dowd spent his time trying to convince those around him that there was a real six-foot rabbit named Harvey in the room, Ron's púca was of an altogether different nature. Ron's mission in life was to convince a skeptical world that his púca, which he would have called Peace, was very real and very much attainable. Ron's serene but unwavering belief in the existence of this spirit had much the same kind of impact on those around him that Dowd's conviction had on his friends and family by the end of the film, when all of the characters came to admit they believed Harvey was truly there, even if they could not see him as Dowd could.

Ron's belief that a truly peaceful world was a realizable goal, and that international education could be one of our greatest tools in attaining it, had a similarly infectious nature. Ron was tireless, but never tiresome, in his efforts to help the rest of us see his vision. I think many of us who had the privilege to spend an extended period of time with Ron, as I did in June of last year during a week-long seminar on global civil society in Ballyvaughan, Ireland, were able to catch at least a fleeting glimpse of Ron's inspirational, if still impish púca.

I will miss Ron's warmth, his broad smile, and his gentle spiritual strength. But, like many others who Ron touched, I am now haunted by a gift he bequeathed to us—the knowledge that his púca is still abroad in our world, just waiting for us to make it visible. **IE**

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