When I first met Dr. John Raines I was very young and bewildered by the complexity of the world around me. It was 2006 and, as a small-town kid who recently moved to North Philadelphia, my head was spinning from life in the city. Its juxtaposition of glamour and poverty, its contrasting permanence and ephemerality, as well as its crowdedness and accompanying loneliness contributed to my confusion. At the same time fierce fighting was going on in Iraq, some of which directly involved close friends of mine. The pockets of the powerful were being lined with the spoils of war as the economy boomed, but it was all too clear that the bulk of Americans were not being invited to the table.

For those that know him, it will come as no surprise that Dr. Raines’ thoughtful instruction and guidance helped me to derive meaning from my observations and experiences during that time. As a man who had not only lived through, but had actively opposed many of the our country’s unjust policies in the latter half of the 20th century including segregation, the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and the manically individualistic capitalism of the 1980’s and 90’s he possessed the accumulated experience to speak wisely about the age of terrorist attacks and unjustified war in the Middle East. His passion for social justice inspired me first to attend and then to organize candlelight vigils for the dead and wounded soldiers in Iraq as a way of voicing my support for the fighting men and women, as well as raising public awareness of the human cost of war.

Two years later worldwide financial institutions were failing, and the economies of North America and Europe were falling into recession. At the same time, Americans were electing their first black president. Again I was in class with Dr. Raines, and just as before I drew on his wisdom to understand the changes that were taking place around me. I’ll never forget Dr. Raines’s lecture on the morning after Barrack Obama won the election, which combined personal stories about his experiences during the civil rights movement and findings from various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences to explain why the event that had just taken place was truly momentous.

Three times between 2006 and 2010, I asked Dr. Raines to write a letter of recommendation for me. Each time he graciously accepted. The first two letters helped me secure funding for academically related excursions. The first was to southern India, the second to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. It would be impossible to overstate the impact that both of these opportunities had on my development both as a person and as a scholar, and Dr. Raines’s role in making them happen is not lost on me. Without Dr. Raines’s selfless aid in the form of articulate and impassioned recommendation letters I would not have had these amazing opportunities, and would not have gained the knowledge and experience that came from them. The third letter was for admission to graduate school, which helped me to win not only admission, but also the competitive fellowship on which I am currently funded. Perhaps nowhere else is Dr. Raines’s influence on my life more readily apparent then in my own inclusion in the academic community.
For a young scholar like myself, there was no better early role model than Dr. Raines. In his words and actions Dr. Raines exemplifies what it means to be an intellectual in the modern age. His willingness to grapple simultaneously with abstract concepts, as well as the practical implications of these concepts for the everyday life of men, women, and children of all creeds and races makes him stand out in the scholarly community as someone who not only embraces the esoteric, but also the down-to-earth. The thoughtful consideration that Dr. Raines brings to every student’s question, scholarly debate, or intellectual conversation is something that I strive to emulate. Further, I share his deep belief that our scientific pursuit to comprehend the world and the forces that shape it should always be subservient to the need to take care of our fellow humans, other species, and the planet itself. It is these lessons and beliefs, passed down to his students, that potentially best illustrate his legacy and lasting influence.

Today while I am still quite young a variety of transformative learning experiences many of which Dr. Raines directly or indirectly provided for me—have made me a very different person from the one he first met in 2006. Today, I teach my own undergraduate course. As a teacher I try to honor the legacy of Dr. Raines by bringing my full attention and energy to the intellectual and personal development of my students. While I sincerely hope to one day be seen as he is, as a source of information and knowledge about the world, I also strive to teach with the wisdom that he shared with me: sometimes simply asking the big questions is more powerful than answering many little ones, and that our intellect is not nearly as important as the soul. When intellect and soul work in concert, there is nothing they cannot achieve.

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