

Remembering Jim McEntee

By Milina Jovanovic

In August of 1999 I came to the Office of Human Relations for the first time for a job interview. The Office was hiring people with research experience to work on the Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions. Several days after I was hired, I saw Jim McEntee for the first time. I've always been very intuitive and I immediately felt very comfortable with him. No one told me that he was exactly my father's age, but that was my guess. My parents live in Belgrade, Serbia, (former Yugoslavia) and, naturally, I miss them. When I saw Jim smiling, it was as if I saw my father's smile. Jim was curious about our research process and about new people working in the Office. He seemed so gentle and sincere that I instantly wanted to spend more time with him. However, four of us were placed in an office outside of the County building and we were so busy with our research in the next sixteen months that it wasn't easy to find much time for socializing.

After we finished our field-work, analysis, and reports we were able to have more balanced lives. I remember, we were preparing a big conference in December of 2000, and Jim invited me to his office to ask me how I wanted to be introduced as one of the speakers. He took notes while I was speaking and asked some additional, personal questions. When he finished with that we sat there and continued chatting and, again, I felt that I did not need to use many words with Jim to achieve understanding. On December 6, 2000 before I was supposed to talk about the contributions of immigrants in our County, I was a little nervous. Mr. Rigo Chacon and Jim McEntee were on the stage, and when I climbed up there and looked at the two of them I felt so supported and encouraged, that I gained a special inspiration to talk about the power and strength of all of us who are immigrants. Having some previous stage experience, to me the stage became a magical spot again, but for that to happen, I needed Jim's encouragement.

Between the end of 2000 and June of 2002 when Jim retired, I had a privilege to continue working in the same office. As always, I did not need to talk much with him. It was enough to see him in the morning and feel better for the rest of the day. My family and I joined others for an annual party at his house. Seeing his family and how modest they all were, I thought that the McEntee family and their life style were great role models for my daughter to see.

After Jim retired I called him at home several times for business reasons. He never forgot to ask about my daughter and my family. Every time I saw Jim or talked to him after he retired he sounded so relaxed and it seemed that he was enjoying his retirement. He visited Teresa's and my office at the beginning of September of 2004, just several days before he died. A boy accompanied Jim, and Jim called him his new buddy. That was a nice scene to see, and that is how I want to remember Jim. He was always young at heart and basically optimistic. That spirit, his spirit, will always be here, at 70 W. Hedding, in San Jose, the San Francisco Bay Area, and will travel much further.