

Peter Gabel before his death on October 25, 2022 submitted the following essay that was published as part of the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report of his 1968 class at Harvard:

“Since our last Reunion, my life has taken a sharp turn, not uncommon for people our age. Last June, I was diagnosed with amyloidosis, a rare blood disease that until recently was uniformly fatal. For an unknown reason, my bone marrow quite suddenly started producing “bad” plasma cells made of sticky fibrils, amyloids, which then lodged in my kidneys and heart and perhaps other organs in my body. Fortunately, there is now a treatment requiring two years of chemotherapy, of which I’ve now completed the first twelve weeks (the first twenty-four weeks are the most intensive). One of the new drugs (daratumumab) contains an antibody that attacks and kills the amyloid cells; and it appears to have stopped the production of new amyloid cells as of this writing. Ridding the organs of existing amyloid fibrils is more difficult, and if it occurs will take much longer; but I feel lucky that I may have begun treatment in time to have stopped the disease from getting worse before it could kill me. Nevertheless, amyloidosis is not curable and will probably require testing and treatment for the rest of my life, absent the discovery of new drugs (there are currently trials for drugs that may clear the organs themselves).

“Facing death more directly as I have begun to do is one of my main spiritual tasks now, and I am trying to open myself to entering that portal, if I can put it that way. I have actually hired someone to help me in that effort since I find it quite hard to summon the awareness I’m aspiring to on my own. My main guide up to this point has been my own sense of the utter miraculousness of my own life – the fact that I was for whatever reason incarnated out of nothingness into existence as “me” – and the

miracle of the universe itself as it stretches up toward infinity when I look up at the sky at night. Somehow this other side of the miracle – that of creation (of the universe, of each flower, of “me” and every other “me”) – seems to offer a pathway for preparing me for death. But I haven’t gotten there yet.

“As I see the world since our graduation, I think we are still fighting the battle of the sixties, that amazing opening-up of consciousness that gave birth more or less all at once to the Civil Rights movement, the women’s movement, the LGBTQ movement, the environmental movement, and the frame-breaking counterculture that pointed toward a different, more affirming and loving way for human beings to relate to each other. Beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan, there has been a full-scale mobilization by the forces of what is rightly called the “reaction” that has tried through every political, cultural, and legal means to reverse the opening-up of the heart that the ‘60s represented, out of fear that our generation’s efforts would lead to destruction of all forms of traditional community and identity and to humiliation of those trying so hard to prevent it. “We will not be replaced” – the chant of the white nationalists leading the Charlottesville protests against the taking down of Confederate statues in that city – reflects a fear of the other and a clinging to pathological forms of “we” like whiteness that reveals that the multiracial, inclusive, communal impulse of our generation’s movements are experienced as a threat of erasure, of humiliation, rather than an offer of an embrace.

“And in truth this convulsive, long period of reaction is not totally unreasonable considering how much our movements have been driven by anger and rage at injustice rather than compassion and extending healing energy towards those who are afraid of the Left, of humiliation, and being demonized. So I think we have to bring a higher spiritual dimension to our politics and our movements that tolerates the fear generated by pointing toward a different, more open way of relating and seeks to recognize with

understanding the resistance of those who at first oppose what we are trying to bring into being. My efforts to face my own mortality brought on with more urgency by my illness and the compassionate politics that I am speaking for here are not entirely different. With any luck I hope to be playing bass with the Central Park Zoo at our Reunion's opening night dinner-dance on the evening of May 31, and to see you all then!"