**The Final Word: A Tribute to John and Suanne Roueche**

**from**

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There was standing room only in the Western Avenue Baptist Church that Sunday morning in Statesville, North Carolina. Pastor Davis was thrilled at the steady increase in attendance over the past few weeks; everyone wanted to see the miracle. Pastor Davis gave a moving introduction punctuated with a goodly number of amens from the congregation. Then, dressed in a starched white shirt and blue short pants, Little Johnny Roueche, age 5, came to center stage and began reciting Bible verses by heart. Sometime later, Pastor Davis stopped him and brought the miracle to an end with a triumphant prayer; he knew Johnny Roueche could have gone on for hours.

John Edward Roueche was a child prodigy. How very fortunate for the Community College Movement and for all of us who have worked in the community college vineyards that John Roueche decided to cast his lot with the down-trodden segment of higher education—the People’s College, Democracy’s College. The Community College was clearly John Roueche’s calling.

Since 1971, his legacy as the Sid W. Richardson Regents Chair and Professor and Director, Community College Leadership Program (CCLP), at The University of Texas at Austin, has already become legend before his formal retirement on August 31, 2012. He has written 37 books and over 150 articles; he has spoken to over 1,300 colleges and universities; he has received 38 national awards for distinguished service and leadership; and over $40 million in grants have been awarded programs and projects in the CCLP. Under his leadership the Community College Leadership Program has graduated 500-plus leaders. One-third of these graduates are women, and one-third are minorities. More than 200 became community college presidents. The current CEOs of the American Association of Community Colleges, the League for Innovation, Commission on Colleges/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, Director of NISOD, and Director of UT’s Achieving the Dream are CCLP graduates.

These facts and figures are simply awesome. They confirm John Roueche’s place in the 110-year history of the community college movement as the most prolific, creative, gifted, outstanding leader and educator in the community college world. No former leader comes close to matching his record, and we are not likely to see his kind ever again. But the facts and figures that reflect his contributions to education are in no way the full measure of the man.

Those who know him well relish and celebrate his delightful sense of humor, his keen ability to create networks of inclusiveness, his uncanny gift for grafting vision to action, his awesome intelligence, and his genuine compassion and love for humanity. He is absolutely unique, and he is absolutely wonderful.

But John would be the first to say that his greatest achievement occurred when he convinced Suanne Davis to become Suanne Roueche. There has never been such a productive and collaborative team as John and Suanne Roueche. Some have suggested that Suanne was the power behind the throne (and in some situations I am sure she was), but on the whole she has been a full and equal partner with John in creating a legacy that will never be equaled. Suanne powered NISOD into one of the most effective networks in community college history. She has keynoted at hundreds of colleges and conferences. She has received 18 national awards for service and leadership. She helped anchor the Community College Leadership Program as a lecturer and dissertation mentor for hundreds of doctoral students. She was co-author with John on 11 books and many articles, and she was always the sharp-eyed editor who tidied up. On walks in the hills around their dream home in Northwest Austin, they invented some of the most creative titles in higher education: *Between a Rock and a Hard Place, Embracing the Tiger, Strangers in Their Own Land, Practical Magic, The Company We Keep*—each with an explanatory sub-title.

But Suanne has been much more than a full partner with John in creating community college history. Movie-star gorgeous (She could have been the stand-in for Tippi Hedren or Dina Merrill.), her delicate beauty belies her steeled strength and her enormous compassion. As President of the Assistance League of Austin and board member of the National Assistance League, Suanne is the model for servant leadership. Her compassion for animals makes her the poster girl for PETA. In Austin she earned the reputation as “The Possum Lady” for rescuing and releasing hundreds of possums into the wild. She has a similar track record for dogs and cats---many of whom took up permanent residence in the Roueche household. I was deeply honored to have a favorite named TJ (for Terry John) to whom I sent Christmas presents for years. More recently, Suanne has become the champion of pot-bellied pigs and donkeys, and supports their survival in shelters across the country. John and I have always teased her about our desire once we die to come back as one of her dogs; such resurrection would be a life of great luxury and love.

It has been one of the great privileges of my personal and professional life to be an adopted brother for John and Suanne. I am honored to have been asked by *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* to prepare this tribute, and I look forward to many rich and creative years to come in their good company—and especially to returning one day to romp with John as one of Suanne’s dogs, or maybe as one of her donkeys.