



Richard Lattin Raymond
(1931-1991)

Rowland Smith

Richard Lattin Raymond: *in memoriam*

Dick Raymond was the funniest man I have known. The 1960s formed his belle époque, and in that era he was a mercurial source of energy and anarchy and delight. Even when illness began to limit his activities in the early seventies, he was still able to transform an evening, a coffee discussion, a car ride, a meeting with children, into an event of zany fun that held a special quality of transcendent defiance to dullness.

In this lay his easy rapport with children, who were among the most enthralled by his flights of participatory verbal absurdity. Logic turned on its head, a repeated whistle or a groan or a sung note becoming part of the fabric of a tale that incorporated sounds as words into a lucid discourse denying rational meaning. All these elements were part of Dick's performance when in full flood. And they entranced young and old with their imaginative zest. The iron gates were easily torn; the sun was made to run.

But the sun could not be made to stand still. Throughout the 1980s Dick's body deteriorated—and he had enjoyed his body. As his strength waned and his life became more solitary, his love of his house and garden deepened, his domestic pleasures predominated: carpentry, the building of musical instruments, his collecting of fine furniture and rare books and pictures and objets d'art, the news on CNN, the constant view of the Northwest Arm and its ever-varied life. The quieter Dick of the last few years showed only occasional flashes of the irrepressible, younger, healthy man, but the talents he employed to sustain him in ill health were those of the many-faceted energizer of the sixties.

He was musical, he was knowledgeable over an extraordinary range of topics, he was deft. And he had the gift of tongues. Who, of those who knew him in the sixties and early seventies, cannot remember at least one party at which he might have made a speech in Italian or made a formal marriage proposal in German—lengthily and publicly—to a maiden wise enough to be more amused than bewildered? If, in those days, he set his heart on imitating someone speaking Serbo-Croat, it sounded right.

It is that witty, warm, energetic man we remember today. The sympathy we feel for Jocelyn and Michele and Jacques reflects the loss of all that was positive about Dick. And at the same time as we celebrate so rich a life, I, for one, can only feel awe at the dedication shown by his family, and particularly by Jocelyn, in caring for Dick during those dark last months when his physical powers had failed him.

Dick studied science at Yale and English at Toronto. He was a meteorologist in the U.S. Navy, a journalist with Canadian Press, a professor at Dalhousie, poetry editor of the *Dalhousie Review*, a member of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, patron of the Dalhousie Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, a collector and connoisseur of beautiful things, and a bon vivant; that last role, a marvellous synthesis of all his other talents, embodied his most memorable and most personal gift. He was so good to be with in that role.

In early adolescence, when nonconformity is most embarrassing and personal freedom most problematical, my own children would occasionally rebuke my moments of too-obvious fun with the comment that I was "being silly, just as you are when you are with Mr. Raymond." I hope we can all continue to be as joyously silly without Mr. Raymond as we have been with him. It won't be easy.