

Memorial Service for Mandy Sternberg  
October 12, 1983

It's very easy for me to hear Mandy's voice. I just have to imagine myself standing in front of a class, feeling as if I've just secured some complicated philosophical point --- when a confident and inquisitive voice rises up from the seats in front of me saying "But Mr. Flanagan...". I can hear it as clearly as if she were here right now.

Although I can't prove it --- happily not being in the habit of taping my classes --- I'd swear that Mandy started with this "But Mr. Flanagan..." routine the very first day we met in the spring of 1982 in my "Introduction to Moral Philosophy" class.

Seriously, Mandy loved that moral philosophy course and I loved having her in the class --- You see Mandy's "Buts" came from a deep and abiding concern for humanity, and they came with a warmth and a seriousness and an openness to the responses of others which made it perfectly clear that for all her formidable debating skills Mandy was not in this for the rhetorical fun. Mandy loved to discuss philosophical ideas so much because she understood that they mattered; talking about ethics and social and political theory were ways of talking about the most important thing of all: how to be good and live well. Mandy's enthusiasm got us all talking that semester and I think her classmates appreciated her witty and incisive presence as much as I did.

Mandy and I met again in the fall of last year in another course. My respect and admiration for Mandy grew even deeper. I

became more and more aware of her boundless energy and her immensely positive and concerned attitude towards everything and everyone she touched. Her enthusiasm for ideas continued to show in class; but I would also see Mandy's energy as we crossed paths on runs around Lake Waban, and as I saw her sincere and abiding care for her friends. I missed not having Mandy in class this past spring, but she never passed my office without stopping by and spreading some of her warmth and enthusiasm my way; and, of course, we talked often about her plans for this year at Oxford. I relished the thought of some Oxford don getting Mandy's patented "But Professor so and so" treatment.

There is undoubtedly something sad about the life of such a good person ending so prematurely; and it is easy --- indeed it is characteristically human --- to focus on all the plans and dreams and promises left unfulfilled. But it is important to remember, as Socrates pointed out at his trial, that the important thing is not living but living well. A good life which leaves certain promises unfulfilled is all that any of us can realistically expect. Mandy's short but exceedingly good life is a reminder of that.

I want to close with a reading from Immanuel Kant, one of Mandy's favorite philosophers --- in this passage Kant speaks, to my mind at least, of a life like Mandy's.

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes...it is good in itself. Even if by some special disfavor of destiny or nature this will is entirely lacking in its power to carry out its intentions; if by its utmost effort it accomplishes less than we had hoped...even then it

would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has full value in itself.