

Directing the Piper

By Elaine Englehardt

This short reflection containing about England's short but highly productive time at Utah Valley State University appeared in the tribute issue *Sunstone* published shortly after his passing.

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AFTER GENE'S FIRST two years at UVSC, I was assigned to be his "handler." As assistant vice president for academic affairs, I was to make sure he had the space and freedom to function as writer in residence, director of academic study abroad, and begin a Mormon Studies program.

The Writer in Residence part was easy. Gene was generous with his time, regularly speaking to various groups and classes. We even held a "Day with Eugene England: UVSC's Writer in Residence" that was filled with readings by Gene and some of his dear friends.

Gene was a piper in nearly everything he did but especially with regard to the Study Abroad program in London. Students wanted to have Eugene England mentor and teach them, but they had to be willing to pay the price. Gene is thorough and meticulous. He spent a minimum of three hours with each of the eighty-plus students who went to London with him the first year, making sure their preparations for the trip were completed to his satisfaction. Students were asked to meet with him in his office, call him on the phone, prove documentation, and in many other ways, demonstrate their commitment to the program.

As a result of this type of preparation, all of Gene's study abroad trips through UVSC were triumphs. Students always had proper housing, enough money, good food, and outstanding instruction. But more than this, the students had access to tickets to about fifty productions in London every spring.

Why is Gene so loved by his students? It is the love that he shows from the beginning to the end of their adventure together. They know he cares about them; they know he does exceptional work; they know he is passionate about what he is teaching. They love him and his wonderful wife, Charlotte, who helps with everything. There is even a Eugene and Charlotte England bench in the Shakespeare Garden in Stratford. The students always knew where Gene and Charlotte might be spending a spare moment or two—snuggling on their bench.

Gene also envisioned a Mormon Cultural Studies program at UVSC. Not many thought it would move past the conception stage, but as those who know Gene know, the conception stage is short-lived. Gene applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant that would allow UVSC to study what a Mormon Cultural

Studies program might look like—and it got funded! A rare feat for a first-time proposal! And after that, Gene’s high-energy mode kicked in. He was assigned to work with the Center For the Study of Ethics, and suddenly, we were all part of Gene’s team, and he was part of ours. The synergy was remarkable. He brought ethics into his program, and we facilitated Mormon Cultural Studies in ours.

I very much miss my job of “handling” Gene. He was a great scholar who combined creative vision and remarkable tenacity.

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