

John W. Mrozak, Jr., 1968.

John Mrozak died of septicemia on March 25, 2015, at the age of 69, after a long period of illness and disability.

John grew up near the Hudson River, in Buchanan, New York. At Hendrick Hudson High School, he was an honor student and captain of the football team, participated in debate and the school newspaper, and played in the school band (piccolo) and orchestra (bassoon). His impressive record there secured him a scholarship to Dartmouth, which otherwise would have been out of the reach of his parents.

At Dartmouth, he was active in student government, majored in English, and joined Foley House. He was also active in the Undergraduate Council and Inter-dormitory Council. He continued to date his high school classmate, Suzanne Hurley, who attended McGill University in Montreal. To the end of his life, John remained very appreciative of his Dartmouth experience. Forty years later, he spoke of wanting to thank the man who'd been director of financial aid. And he spoke fondly of professors whom he'd admired, particularly Alan Gaylord.

After their wedding on the eve of his Dartmouth graduation, he and Suzanne moved to Chicago, where John earned an M.A. in English at the University of Chicago. There he also applied successfully for status as a Conscientious Objector, interrupting his graduate work to do alternative service as a hospital orderly.

The next phase of his life was devoted to helping troubled adolescents. John Isaacson hired John at the Massachusetts Office for Children, where he became Deputy to the Director. He later served the Justice Resource Institute as a Director in their Treatment Facility for Disturbed Teenagers at the Danvers State [Mental] Hospital in Massachusetts. In that capacity, he was called upon to speak at institutions including Harvard, Boston College, and Tufts. He was justifiably proud of his advocacy on behalf of what we now call at-risk youth. John must have brought much to such work. He was a very empathetic man. He struck his college friends as large in body, large in spirit, funny, gentle, generous, thoughtful, and caring. His service as a CO and as a youth counselor gave expression to all of these qualities.

Sadly, his marriage to Suzanne failed, and John moved to Dutchess County, New York, to be near his parents and his childhood home. There he met and married a Ukrainian émigré, Elena Pelih, a talented pianist and piano teacher. Due to complications from diabetes, John spent the last several years of his life in a nursing home in Poughkeepsie. During this period, classmate Jon Hull monitored his situation and served as liaison to a cadre of concerned classmates, friends, and brothers, who offered moral support.

Even in those circumstances, John was not without a sense of humor. He reported that during their senior year, his fraternity brother Bob Reich tried to fix him up with Bob's Wellesley counterpart, Hillary Rodham. According to John, Bob told him that whoever married Hillary would surely become President one day. But he "turned down the date. Oops."

John Mrozak was a fine and sensitive man, a real mensch. He is mourned by his widow Elena and all those who had the pleasure of knowing him.