

## Aaron M. Fine

Many residents of Swarthmore knew Aaron Fine, at least a little, as the 90-year-old fellow who traveled daily through the village pushing his rickety cart, despite all extremes of weather, greeting people along the way with erudite and humorous quips. Some may have seen him dickering with a vendor over a small treasure at a yard sale, or dumpster-diving in search of the perfect addition to a found object installation he was constructing.

Regular readers of the *Swarthmorean* will have had the chance to experience the reach of his brilliant mind and comic sensibility by way of his letters to the editor.

And while many may have been touched by his kind, inquisitive and humble nature, those who were his closest friends loved him to a degree that makes his absence the most profound sort of loss.

Aaron Fine was born in Birmingham, England, in 1923. Son of a dressmaker, he was the youngest of four siblings, including two sisters and a brother. He attended an English public school (what we call a private school in the U.S.), where he majored in ancient Greek, was a chess champion, went regularly to the afternoon cinema, and avoided

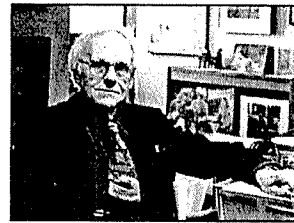
gym at all costs.

When he was 16 his parents, concerned about the political climate in Europe, sent him and his brother to join his sisters in the United States. He arrived on the *RMS Queen Mary* in 1939, first living in Shamokin, Pa., with family.

He attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he continued his interest in languages and became successful on the Ivy League chess circuit. He left college for the Army, where he served as a meteorologist in Valdosta, Georgia. In 1944, he became a naturalized citizen of the U.S.A.

After his stint in the Army, he returned to the University of Pennsylvania to attend law school under the G.I. Bill, and graduated second in his class. It was there that he met Bobbie (Charlotte Colgan), a sparkling, intellectual foil to his wit. They were married in 1947 and lived in Swarthmore for almost 60 years. Bobbie predeceased Aaron in 2011.

During a distinguished legal career he settled landmark cases in his specialties — antitrust and class action — establishing the Fine, Kaplan and Black law firm in 1975 with two brilliant younger



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lawyers, Arthur M. Kaplan and Allen D. Black. The firm is still active today.

Always a firm supporter of the arts and a patron and mentor to many beginning artists, he retired from law at the age of 65 and not only continued to collect art, but also became a maker of art in his own right.

Aaron Fine died October 17 of complications from a heart condition after a determined fight to remain independent and to live each day to the fullest. He leaves us with a sense of justice and decency that will serve to inspire those who knew him for the rest of our lives, reminding us that intelligence, humor and kindness can still exist in this often brute and madding world.

He is survived by his son, David of San Francisco and his daughter, Sue and her husband, Steve Purdy, and stepdaughter, Isabel Purdy, of Montclair, New Jersey.

Plans for a memorial celebration and possibly a memorial yard sale will be announced later. Those wishing to donate to a charity in his and his wife Bobbie's honor may make contributions to The Nature Conservancy, 4245 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22203-1606, and Amnesty International, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20003.

There is also a possible plan to donate a bench in Aaron and Bobbie's honor, perhaps located in one of Aaron's favorite stops along his daily walks. Those interested can contact his daughter Sue at [lily\\_lapin@gmail.com](mailto:lily_lapin@gmail.com) for details.

### *In His Own Words ...*

*A few years ago, Aaron Fine wrote the following prologue to his obituary, which he titled "Preview." He submitted it to the Swarthmorean, but soon after took it home and never returned with the finished product:*

"A while ago, Beth Gross asked me to write my obit, to be put on ice until time to be defrosted. I began but could not get beyond elementary school. I have now tried again, inspired by Keith Douglas's poem 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead!' He was killed in Normandy in 1944 at the age of 24.

[The next paragraph gave information contained in the formal obituary above, except for his mention of another survivor, "the Cat."]

"Aaron suffered from insomnia in the real wee hours of the night giving him ample time for reflection and regret and remorse as his whole life passed behind him. Because of his age he had difficulty pushing buttons into their buttonholes, tying double knots in his shoelaces, cutting his toenails and preventing pills, lurking in the lids of their containers, from popping out like Mexican jumping beans. Toast fell jam-side down. He also had trouble countering the force of gravity. Lifting his cart up the three flights of stone steps on the approach to the college library, he worried about the possibility of a sudden reversal that could transform it into the baby carriage hurtling down the Odessa Steps in Eisenstein's film 'Battleship Potemkin.'

"As he wrote his obit, he was mindful of Robert Herrick's 'His Poetry His Pillar':

"Only a little more  
I have to write  
Then I'll give o'er,  
And bid the world Good-night."

## Memories of Aaron M. Fine

I have lost a treasured mentor: Aaron M. Fine  
He would dictate articles weekly  
That would make new pathways into my mind  
By beholding you become changed  
and so it was with me  
Opened the world beyond my sheltered life  
so that I could definitely see  
Another political view  
along with new words on queue  
every time he spoke  
I wondered about his "genes"  
He was more than a brilliant "bloke"  
There was compassion, generosity  
and a genuine simplicity  
in his lifestyle.  
We both enjoyed flea markets  
and strange, unusual art  
He spoke several languages  
that inspired me to start  
learning a new one  
to prevent alzheimers  
He was a tiny man  
with intensity  
He could stare right through you  
sizing you up  
He reminded me of my Dad  
without the alcoholic side  
It sometimes made me sad  
Aaron would inspire me  
far more than a "fractured Dad"  
He inspired me to publish my poems  
under a pen name "clad"  
so that I would not be sued!

— Ruth McCausland  
Legal Assistant  
Fine, Kaplan and Black, R.P.C.