

Tribute to Martin Wachs (1941–2021)

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When Transfers was founded in 2018, Marty Wachs and I were given the title of senior editors, which looks good but is a bit ambiguous. We never made any final decisions about articles (Mike Manville does that), so perhaps senior was just a euphemism for old. Nevertheless, Marty and I enjoyed the job of burnishing prose and enhancing the reputations of younger authors.

Since Marty's death in April, the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies has published on its [website](#) an outpouring of praise and gratitude for his life. Marty's colleagues and former students use words like brilliant, inspirational, passionate, amazing, generous, kind, caring, ethical, witty, and cheerful to describe him.

The hundreds of tributes are almost beyond belief, though I'm sure everyone who wrote one would have preferred the opportunity to tell Marty personally how much he meant to them. By a wonderful coincidence, I had that opportunity. I talked to Marty on the telephone the day before he died. I had also, that morning, looked at a word quiz on the internet. The question was: What adjective contains the letters s, p, and n and means "possessing or expressing great sagacity"?

I guessed right — the answer was "sapient," and then looked at the synonyms provided: wise, sage, insightful, judicious, prudent, sensible, and sane. This string of words immediately made me think of Marty, and fortunately, I told him so, during our conversation that evening.

We usually don't take the opportunity to tell our friends how much we admire and respect them. I am thankful to have told Marty that this

collection of words reminded me of him, and he received the compliment with his characteristic good humor.

Marty did so much in so many different fields that most of us know only a small part of everything he accomplished. The tributes flowing in help us see many facets of these accomplishments previously unknown to us. Many people may not have known, for example, that Marty was a great editor. But anyone who has read Transfers has benefited from his skill.

The transportation profession heaped on Marty every award it could give, sometimes twice. Many of these awards were for his research, which was excellent. His writing was lucid and straightforward, but often said things that had not previously occurred to anyone else.

But Marty always thought of himself first as a teacher, and he was an exceptionally gifted one. The American Collegiate Schools of Planning gave Marty its highest honor, the Distinguished Educator Award. Marty surely did more for young people than anyone else in transportation planning. He felt that he had the greatest influence through the careers of his students, and that his most important accomplishment was to help his students lead productive lives and make the world better. As one of his Ph.D. students said, "When I grow up, I want to be like Marty Wachs."

As Mae West said, you only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough. Marty did it right. Transfers is committed to carrying on with the values that he so brilliantly exemplified.