

J. Ledwith

I first met Sarge Shriver in 1961 in connection with ~~the~~ President Kennedy's Panel on Mental Retardation, and with the Jos. P. Kennedy, Jr., Foundation's activities in the ~~xxxxx~~ field. Eunice Kennedy Shriver brought an enormous human compassion and zeal for solving these problems, sometimes demanding a time scale that was more closely related to their urgency than to our practical means of coping with them. Sargent Shriver had all of these, and also the ~~xxx~~ insight to know the very broad base of scientific effort that needed to be built before we could hope to answer the human needs in this field.

a Saturday

I recall ~~an~~ afternoon in Shriver's office at the Peace Corps, where he asked me a casual question about the genetic code-- what was all the excitement about. As I began to tell the story, he grasped its importance immediately, and set aside his other appointments for three hours to get a full account of it, and to ask penetrating questions about ~~what~~ ^{what} it really meant, both for our philosophical concept of human nature, and for its potential implications for nitty-gritty problems that the politician might have to face. Not long thereafter, he was an effective proponent with the Foundation's trustees to support a rather unusual application from Stanford to support a basic laboratory in molecular medicine -- at a time when others must have been pressing very hard to concentrate its resources on shorter-term payoffs in dealing with retarded children. He understood the need for a balanced program to meet the Foundation's goals, and we were supported quite generously.

In later years, I have had many discussions and correspondence with Sarge about ethical problems that come up as side-effects of medical advance. We come from different backgrounds and do not always agree. I have always been impressed that his central motive was the thorough ~~enough~~ airing of such issues, that his main zeal was to encourage people to face up to the ethical dimensions of their decisions, not to enforce a particular doctrine of how to deal with them. He has always taken remarkable pains to ensure the most pluralistic examinations of key problems of modern life. It has been a privilege to see the breadth that he has exhibited in his own deliberations about them.