



Famed humorist P.J. O'Rourke's beginnings included poverty, success at Miami University

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Feb. 17—It wasn't for any lack of talent but rather scant money that saw the then young, budding humorist P.J. O'Rourke almost drop out his freshman year at Miami University in the late 1960s.

The Toledo-native, who later in life won international fame for his satirical writing, was struggling financially.

Fortunately, a Miami American literature professor saw both O'Rourke's talent and his financial woes and moved to help him apply for a scholarship that kept him in college, a long-time Miami friend of O'Rourke told the Journal-News.

O'Rourke, 74, died Tuesday, leaving many across America saddened by the passing of the once-editor of the iconic "National Lampoon Magazine" and later a celebrated author, political commentator and magazine writer whose insightful wit often left the pompous punctured with millions of fans laughing about it.

"Patrick, we never called him P.J., was in my husband's literature class," said former Miami University official Sue Frazier of her deceased husband David.

"David would tell me about this very bright and very talented writer in his class," who was scrambling to pay his tuition, said Frazier, who worked both as the assistant director of financial aid at Miami and later in her career was executive assistant to the vice president of Student Affairs.

"He had a rough time financially when he started out here," she recalled.

Prompted by her husband, Frazier found a recently vacated scholarship was available and O'Rourke applied and won tuition funding allowing him to stay and finish his undergraduate studies at Miami.

The Fraziers befriended their "Patrick" and he would periodically visit their Oxford home, sharing dinners and lengthy chats.

Decades later, O'Rourke's visits back to his old college often included gathering in the Fraziers' home to reminisce about his youth and updates on his latest literary adventures.

"He was out at our house a good many times. What David saw in Patrick was a very, very talented writer. His creativity and his way of looking at life produced something he would write about that fit his style and his innate ability."

"David had no doubts he (O'Rourke) could succeed but you see a lot of that and doesn't always happen. But in his case it did," said Frazier, who is now retired from Miami.

Contrary to O'Rourke's later fame and persona, the collegiate version of the writer "was mostly serious," she recalled.

And smart for a young man.

"There was never any problem about having conversations with him and sometimes we got into arguments about things. He was very articulate and as articulate in his speaking as he was in his writing."

And it was O'Rourke's writings that made him beloved across the world.

O'Rourke's passing saw a parade of praise for both his career and his amiable and personable approach to working with colleagues and editors.

After Miami he studied in graduate school at Johns Hopkins where he was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. After receiving an M.A. in English, O'Rourke worked at small newspapers in Baltimore and New York.

In the 1970s, O'Rourke became editor-in-chief of The National Lampoon, where he created with Doug Kenney, the now classic 1964 High School Yearbook Parody," according to a statement released by officials at Grove Atlantic publishers.

"He was the Foreign Affairs Desk Chief for Rolling Stone, a position that allowed him to expose the hypocrisies of world politics from the Persian Gulf to the Philippines. O'Rourke was also a regular correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly, and his writing appeared in publications including Automobile Magazine, Esquire, Vanity Fair, Car and Driver, The Daily Beast, and The Weekly Standard."

In the early 1990's he left Washington DC for his beloved New Hampshire where he continued to write. He was the H. L. Mencken Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, a regular panelist on NPR's Wait Wait . . . Don't Tell Me, and editor-in-chief of the web magazine American Consequences. He leaves behind his wife Tina O'Rourke and three children.

Morgan Entrekin, CEO and publisher of Grove Atlantic said "P. J. was one of the major voices of his generation."

"His insightful reporting, verbal acuity and gift at writing laugh-out-loud prose were unparalleled," said Entrekin.

Frazier admits neither she, nor her husband, predicted the heights of O'Rourke's literary fame.

"We did not anticipate Patrick would have the kind of success that he had. But I'm so glad his talent was recognized and that he succeeded."