

## **GREGORY BOROWIK SOBEL**

**June 23, 1957 to April 4, 2005**

Gregory Sobel, an environmental mediator with a national reputation and a glittering array of accomplishments in environmental, public policy mediation, died on April 4, 2005, after a long struggle with complications from serious injuries sustained in an automobile accident in 1996.

Greg was beloved to many for countless reasons. We loved him for his highly developed sense of justice and dedication to work focused not on enriching his life, but rather on using his life to contribute to others. His unusual dedication began in high school. He founded and operated a soup kitchen in Baltimore, choosing to feed the unfortunate rather than simply protest the injustices that led to their plight.

We loved him for his brilliance. He graduated from Western Washington University and earned two graduate degrees, a Juris Doctorate from Northeastern University School of Law and a Masters in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was licensed to practice law in New York and Massachusetts, and taught negotiation and conflict resolution skills in Russia, Ukraine, and Thailand and in graduate schools and professional conferences across the U.S. He served as chair of the Boston Bar Association's Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution and was active with the American Bar Association's Dispute Resolution Section and the Association for Conflict Resolution's Section on Environment and Public Policy.

We loved him for his determination to address the suffering caused by our collective inability and unwillingness to resolve conflicts arising from our diversity. Greg was strong enough to face this most pernicious source of conflict, compassionate enough to seek out opportunities to serve in this most difficult arena, and wise enough to recognize that until we resolve this fundamental source of human suffering, we will never learn to live in peace and harmony. He passionately worked toward addressing our country's tragic legacy of racism and the particular impact of environmental degradation on people of color, by immersing himself in activities aimed at ensuring broader access to the field of environmental and public policy mediation for people of color, women, and other minorities.

We loved him for his pioneering work to bring the wisdom of mediation and conflict resolution to address the critical needs arising from our environmental irresponsibility by mediating high profile, complex environmental and public policy disputes. After serving as the Director of Environmental Mediation Program for the Massachusetts Office of Dispute Resolution, where he helped design innovative mediation programs for the state's Department of Environmental Protection, he founded Environmental Mediation Services, mediating cases involving hazardous waste cleanup, natural resource damage claims, land use conflicts, disputes over habitat and endangered species protection, brownfields redevelopment, and federal facility closure and remediation. He served as mediator for the clean-up of the Housatonic River in Western Massachusetts, Fort Devens, and the Massachusetts Military Reservation on Cape Cod.

We loved him for his dedication to the principles of deep democracy, using innovative conflict resolution techniques to encourage community participation in order to resolve high profile, controversial issues where our traditional political system had failed, such as destroying non-

stockpiled chemical materiel, aquifer remediation, ecological impacts of ski area expansion, federal student financial aid policy, and a new permit scheme for coastal industries based on environmental indicators.

We loved him for his willingness to use his own suffering and challenges as a vehicle to educate and broaden the awareness of others. Prior to his accident, Greg was an avid outdoorsman who loved to go whitewater rafting, skiing, hiking and kayaking. He became keenly aware of the problems within the healthcare system – especially the need to advocate aggressively for yourself or ensure someone else will if you are not able. His chronic pain and loss of physical mobility made him sensitive to the suffering of others and the insecurities people bring to their interactions with the disabled.

We miss his friendship and contributions to the mediation field. He will not be replaced in either domain and will remain an inspiring example to all of us. Those of us who knew him well will always carry keen memories of his helpfulness and generosity, his wisdom and love, his humor and brilliance, and his insatiable curiosity about life. We will tell stories of the ways in which he enriched our lives, of the ways in which he touched our hearts, and of the ways in which he worked tirelessly to bring peace and harmony into the many conflicts he mediated.