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Goodbye, Mr. Carter

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Goodbye, Mr. Carter

Movies about inspirational teachers have long been crowd pleasers, from *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (the 1939 and 1969 adaptations of the 1933 novella about a beloved British boarding school headmaster), to 1967's groundbreaking *To Sir, with Love* featuring Sidney Poitier, and of course 1989's *Dead Poets Society*, with Robin Williams unforgettably urging his students "Carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary." Ben Carter, my colleague (and friend) in the library since 2013, always struck me as the kind of teacher who fit the mold of these fictional predecessors. The AUC community and many others in Cairo and beyond were shocked to learn of Ben's passing in late May, after a two-months' illness.

Ben, a native of eastern Canada, joined AUC and the Library in 2013. Like his cinematic counterparts, he was charged with readying his students for the world, which he achieved as an instructor of the bedrock LALT courses aimed at developing student's information literacy and research skills. His work with the Core Curriculum Advisory Committee and the Academic Integrity Committee demonstrated his commitment to AUC's Liberal Arts mission, as well as his sense of fairness and dedication to keeping students on the right path academically and ethically.

But Ben knew that there was more to education and the university experience. As an instructor of the Core Curriculum's Philosophical Thinking course, he sought to expand minds beyond the rigors of academic practice. Perhaps the most important hand-out he distributed in class was a small card featuring poet Wallace Stevens' "Of Mere Being," with its opening line "The palm at the end of the mind." He knew that inspiring students, especially to develop as people, was at the core of what it was to teach, and in this he had much in common with the on-screen teachers who motivated their students to break free of boundaries that held them back. Ben himself put this into practice in his own life, including through extensive travel (whether to Dahab or further afield to Germany, Ethiopia, India, and Nepal) in the interest of widening his own modes of thought and experience.

Ben mastered the art of connecting with people, as evidenced by his friends, from diverse spheres of his life in Cairo, who came in droves to visit him during his illness. And what better way is there to connect, especially with university students, than music? Broad, encyclopedic, eclectic: these could all describe Ben's taste in music, to put it mildly, from Bach, to the blues of Robert Johnson, to Radiohead. A musician himself, he shared these with his friends, and also introduced these styles and masters to his students in and outside the classroom. Ben had the ability to connect on other levels as well, through his openness, approachability, and interest in what concerned his students in their lives outside of school, all of which endeared him to them.

According to cinematic canon, inspirational teachers should have something out of the ordinary about them – Mr. Chips' dress and other later life eccentricities, an unusual background like Mark Thackeray, Poitier's character (an unemployed engineer of African-Caribbean descent) in *To Sir, with Love*. Or the frenetic charisma and sense of

humor of Robin Williams' portrayal of teacher John Keating in *Dead Poets Society*. Ben's own dry wit resonated with his students, as did his wide-ranging, even unexpected background and interests, lanky frame and pony-tail, and his sartorial style. Ben was a man of character, and he was also a bit of a character, and to his students an unforgettable figure. His passing has touched so many of them. These are their words, from some of the many messages written in the Celebration of Life book dedicated to Ben Carter.

May you be rewarded for the knowledge you've spread, for all the times you stood by our sides, for all the times you've been more than a professor, and most importantly for all the time you were an amazing human being.

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You will be missed. Thank you for making the Philosophical Thinking course so interesting, and for always teaching us valuable lessons. You are one of my favorite professors that I will never forget.

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You were among my favorite teachers and the greatest human being I ever met. You were there as a mentor, as a great thinker, and a friend. You showed up for me when I was grieving my mother's loss, you listened and supported me with zero judgment. It is people like you who inspired and continue to inspire me. If it wasn't for you I would've never went to Band or explored beyond our philosophy class. I'm sure you're in a better place now, may you soar to eternal heights and may your wild, curious, caring spirit rest joyfully. I love you so much, friend

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I've only been a student with him for a semester & quickly realized how good a person he is. I was going to celebrate his healthy coming back with a Red Bull or some sort of caffeine that he was addicted to, but I guess I can't do that now. He will be missed.

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I was his student worker for a whole semester. In that one semester, I now realize that he was the kindest, most supportive, and loving mentor, boss, and person I've ever had. Humanity truly lost an angel. We will always miss you.

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I have only taken LALT. I have always loved how you started the lectures with music. You were a very cool person and the coolest teacher ever.

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You were truly a shining light that gave us a wonderful experience. Being your student and working with you showed me how great you were as a human being. A rare gem. We will all miss your witty comments and amazing sense of humor.

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He was one of the kindest and pure hearted professors I have ever met at uni. He didn't hesitate even once to help anyone. I am honored to be one of his students.

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Benjamin was an amazing soul who had a lot to offer. He was very kind and funny. I looked forward to his classes/lectures the most. He was my favorite professor so far since I came to this university. He deserved the best and I hope he is resting peacefully while listening to the jazz music he always made us listen to in the beginning of class & cracking jokes that some people couldn't get, now but the angels he's with now laugh with him.

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You were fun, authentic, and so passionate. I took LALT several years ago, but it was special and different in so many ways, it was useful and I used what I learned in my uni research, thesis, and up to today in my job. Thank you, AUC will miss you.

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Dr. Benjamin, you will forever be remembered by me. What a great man you were. So simple, so kind, & loving. I'm sorry that I forgot to text you back this semester, I really felt the shame and guilt when I knew it was too late to set up our "classical musical gathering" we called [that] we hoped would happen. We shared a big passion in music. We always talked about it after class, always. We laughed & had fun. I wish I could say one last goodbye, will always love and miss you my friend.

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It hurts coming to campus knowing I won't see you walking with your beautiful smile, light and cheerful soul everyday as usual. The semester I took LALT with you was one of the best that I experienced in uni. Although all other courses were so hard, your sessions gave me the positive vibes needed to help me get going. You helped me on the personal as well as academic level, till today and forever, the skills you taught me, to finish my readings effectively and write the best writings, will forever be with me. And though when I came for advice it was not your job, yet you helped me progress as a person and a student.