

Conard Fowkes and I had several traits in common: we were Equity Councilors, we were the fathers of three, we were Ivy Leaguers. My theory is that AEA members need two things from me as a Councilor: Service and Leadership; that my children need two things from me as their father: Love and Boundaries; and that the Harvard College Fund needs nothing from me.

I served alongside Connie on the Equity council for twenty years, literally alongside him as we usually sat next to one another in the back row: two disruptive rascals. I am a Harvard man, while Connie had gone to some fly-by-night, backwater diploma mill in New Haven, Ct. However, despite his educational shortcomings, Connie was a stickler for proper English usage and became Equity's ex-officio grammarian. "As I said," "implied," "different from" and other corrections of careless Equity councilors would ring out from Connie's seat, and woe betide the speaker who misused "beg the question" in the common if mistaken way to mean "call for the question."

Connie's remarks were never mean or harsh – more the faintly exasperated tone of a father reminding his progeny once again to hang up the towels, clear their place or take out the trash.

I knew of Conard from the moment I became a professional actor. He was on the governing boards of both Equity and AFTRA and he co-founded VITA, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. I can remember reading about the contributions of this soap opera star in our union newspapers, thinking, "Boy, this Conrad Fowkes is really dedicated; too bad they keep misspelling his name." You could fill this theater several times over with the actors and stage managers whose tax returns Connie prepared, doing his best to help them while pointing out where their imaginations and the tax code were in conflict.

Connie for years was Equity's Treasurer and then Secretary-Treasurer, after Council – in a stroke of cost-cutting genius – combined two non-salaried positions into one non-salaried position. Frequently when Council would suddenly come up with some splendid idea, it would be Connie who would point out that there would be a cost to this splendid idea and that money – particularly dues money – didn't grow on trees. If it were a worthy idea, however, one that would benefit the members, Connie would lead the charge to increase the line item in the budget.

Not only did Connie provide AEA with decades of Service and Leadership as Treasurer and on VITA, but he did so in the style of my ideal father – with Love and Boundaries.

Looking back, I stand in awe of both Conard's service to our unions and his parenting style. Maybe I should have gone to Yale.