

## Patrick Quinn: Paying Dues

You may not have known Patrick Quinn. If so, that wasn't his fault. He was a consummate politician who loved to meet people, to know them and to be known by them. I can see him in another life as a Philadelphia ward heeler.

If you didn't know him, I feel as sorry for you as if you had missed Laurette Taylor's Amanda Wingfield. Let me give you a hint of what you missed. Patrick was a wonder – a once-in-a-generation phenomenon at our union. He joined Equity in 1970 at the age of twenty. He became a Chorus Councillor in 1977, a Principal Councillor in 1982, Third Vice-President in 1985, First Vice-President in 1988 and President in 2000. He had been selected to be our new Executive Director. None of the titles did him justice. Fueled by cigarettes and Coca-Cola, he was a dynamo of concern and activity on behalf of Equity's membership.

If you will forgive an over-simplified generalization, we actors tend to be needy and self-centered (not you, of course – the people you work with.) We read the script: “blah, blah, blah – my line.” We scan the review: “blah, blah, blah – notable in a small role is....” We ask, “How big is my dressing room?” “When do I bow?” Actors Equity rarely enters our thoughts until something goes wrong: we're not getting the right rehearsal breaks; the stage is too hot; the dressing rooms are too cold; the producer wants to schedule an extra show. Then, like the children producers sometimes accuse us of being, we expect our Equity parents to step in and set things right. And who can blame us? That's why we pay our dues, right?

Those dues pay for a hard-working, dedicated staff who fight an uphill battle against the law of supply and demand to keep us from giving away our talents for free and keep producers from taking advantage of us. The staff disposes of and decides on some issues and questions, but most issues and questions are decided by committees of regular Equity members like yourself. Although these decisions are reported to and/or approved by Equity Council (which is the ultimate authority at Equity and responsible for setting union policy), the work at Equity is done in committees. These committees, composed of unpaid Equity members, are supposed to have Councillors (also unpaid) as their chairs and vice-chairs, so Councillors are sometimes the vice-chair or even the chair of more than one committee. Before he became President and was convinced to cut back, Patrick seemed to be the chair or the vice-chair of every committee: nominating committees, negotiating teams, executive review committees, House Affairs Committee, President's Planning Committee, Equity Pension & Health Caucus, national representation committee, Business Theater Committee, Production Contract Committee, Alien Committee – and that doesn't include his work as a trustee or officer for the Equity Foundation, Equity-League Pension & Health Fund, BC/EFA, and the Actors' Fund. He may have slept in his apartment, but he lived at Equity.

I don't know how he managed to maintain a career on top of all this, but he did. Indeed, Patrick could have been a star. Who knows what sort of career Patrick might have had if he had ignored Equity – as most members do – and had focused all his time and skills and creative gifts on getting work for himself. (I doubt that sitting across frequently contentious negotiating tables from various producers all those years stood

him in particularly good stead at audition time either.) Back in the 1970's, Patrick played a screamingly funny lounge singer named (I think) Rickey Dee in a hilarious series of television commercials for a Midwest retailer. While in L.A. as Bruce Granit in the national tour of On the Twentieth Century with Rock Hudson and Judy Kaye, he got a development deal with ABC-TV. He was funny, and he was gorgeous. Had he been more self-centered, Patrick might well have been the world's star; but he was generous and other-oriented, and he was Equity's shining star. Our heavens are the dimmer for his loss.

Although not a star, he was a "working actor" – high praise in a business that keeps so many of us on the sidelines so much of the time. Patrick acted in over 175 Equity shows, including ten on Broadway. Back in the 1980's, when fewer "working actors" served on Council, Patrick led the way in encouraging more to run. I was one so encouraged; and although I was not one of his closest buddies, he was a friend and I liked him enormously.

We sat on several of the same committees: Alien, Production Contract, Pension and Health Trustees; and we shared the class clown's penchant for the well-timed wisecrack. Patrick was a lot more than funny in meetings. He had ideas – good ones – that he expressed forcefully but without seeming opinionated. He had the politician's touch of connecting with people, remembering their names and making them feel important. But it wasn't an act. People were important to Patrick. Actors were very important to him. For thirty years, Patrick spent unbelievable hours every week working – for no pay – for his fellow actors. It is ironic that he died just as he was about to

become Executive Director of AEA and actually be paid for all his work. Part of your November dues payment would have gone towards paying Patrick a salary – the first time he would have received any money for all his work for us. The next time you make out a check for your dues to AEA, please spend a moment in silent appreciation of and gratitude to Patrick Quinn. You would only be paying him his due.