



BRAJESH GERALD FRIEDBERG: A LIFE OF SERVICE

– by Sampad Martin Kachuck

Brajesh Gerald Friedberg passed away on Saturday, December 14, 2024. He was 86 years old.

Brajesh was a longstanding member of the Mount Madonna Center (MMC) and Mount Madonna School (MMS) communities, where his exceptional contributions helped to shape and define us in so many ways.

Over the decades, Brajesh was very involved in MMS and its founding. He served as principal for five years and was a key member of the school's executive committee for many years after that. As principal he focused on faculty, curriculum, and difficult budgetary decisions. On the executive team, he worked to expand the school's board of directors and stabilize finances with a structured tuition process. One little-known fact is that he also taught auto shop in the early days. Brajesh was instrumental in the school's development at its crucial initial stages.

In addition to his significant impact at MMS, Brajesh did great work in all the worlds he invested in, as a professor of political science at the University of California, Davis, in his earlier career, then later blessing us with his determined focus, both at the School and Center. As a founding member of MMC leadership, Brajesh established the hosted program business model for the organization, where his skillful outreach to leading thinkers, organizations, and other communities, inviting them to hold their retreats at MMC, helped generate mutually beneficial long term relationships and essential financial revenue for our community to grow and flourish. Through his many decades of service as programs director, MMC prospered and became well known as a desired venue for a wide variety of programs and retreats in alignment with our own mission and values.

Brajesh's life of service is to be celebrated and honored. Yet even more important than lauding his numerous accomplishments is the celebration of the person himself. Deeply caring, a man of principle and integrity, willing to consider and reflect, Brajesh was a true community organizer who valued thoughtful process, compromise, and speaking individual truth while promoting group will and wisdom. An ethical and deeply spiritual practitioner, he was a firm believer in established values; once there were agreements, he'd stand firmly by them with

full committed action. He had endless capacities for sharing love and compassion.

We honor and recognize his generosity of spirit, his willingness to appreciate others, and certainly his humor. He impacted so many of us personally and directly.



Community members who knew Brajesh over the years have offered some additional beautiful insights...

MMS alumna and former advancement director Lara Kilpatrick, now a member of the MMC leadership team, offered: “Brajesh has been an inspirational part of my life since I was a teenager: he was MMS principal when I was in high school, and I learned from him the invaluable skills of how to change the tires and oil on my car and he spoke at my graduation. Later, I worked with him in MMC Programs and this influenced the arc of my career. In recent years, I have had the pleasure of engaging in deeply touching conversations with him about family and living a life of meaning. It has been a gift to witness selfless service modeled in such gracious and dedicated ways.”

Savita Brownfield, who for many years worked alongside him in the MMC Programs (now Guest Services) Office, shared: “My experience of Brajesh was through the Center, but not directly in relation to MMS... however the qualities he brought to every endeavor were surely the same! Brajesh was fiercely focused on and protective of the well-being of the whole! I have never met anyone with a stronger capacity for concentration and service. During the years I worked with him directly, he held the positions of program director (now held by three or four people), president of Mount Madonna Institute (MMI), volunteer in the fire brigade, member of the Panchayat, Hanuman Fellowship board member, and MMC administrator – ALL AT THE SAME TIME!! He was a mentor through example, and because he was so busy, every moment counted! I learned the importance of respecting other people’s time through him.”

Bhavani Siegel, former MMS teacher and longtime community member, who also worked alongside Brajesh in Guest Services, offered: “Brajesh selflessly served the Center for decades, being responsible for inviting many wonderful teachers like Thich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Angeles Arrien, to name just a few. Brajesh was a dedicated practitioner of *sadhana* (spiritual practice); he also taught *pranayama* (breathing techniques) and meditation, as well as philosophy at yoga retreats and yoga teacher trainings. His class, ‘Failure to Meditate’ – now recorded for future yogis – was always a highlight for students. There weren’t many places in our community in which Brajesh *didn’t* contribute.”

Former MMS head of school and teacher Supriya McDonald recalled: “I admired Brajesh for his ability to listen and sort through issues with clarity and balance. Also, his willingness to engage in direct passionate political action and social justice, staying in tune with the issues of our country/world.”

Bob Caplan, former MMS teacher and current active MMC community member, said: “Brajesh was deeply affected by injustice and the suffering of others. His conscience drove him to acts of service, sometimes at great risk to himself. In 1960, he took a bus from New York to Alabama, where he joined forces with a coalition helping to register Black voters. In 2005, he traveled to New Orleans to help those suffering from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In 2014, he joined an NGO working with a persecuted Burmese ethnic group that had taken refuge in Thailand. I am in awe of his discipline, his dedication to the evolution of human dignity.”

Sarojani Rohan, co-founder and former MMS preschool director and teacher, shared: “Brajesh shared his wisdom and skills for the betterment of not only the Center, but for counseling so many of us on everything from how to engage for anti-war protests to car purchases! Truly, he lived a life with an incredible work ethic and generosity of spirit. May he rest in peace.”

From Arpita Ezell, former MMS teacher and longtime MMC community member: “Brajesh was indeed an essential pillar in establishing MMC as a successful retreat center, education center and community. His enthusiasm to serve and his discipline and devotion were truly inspiring. He believed in being positive and his final years were particularly imbued with his spirit of joyfulness and gratitude. He was an extraordinary person on so many levels, and his sincere caring and friendship for others touched many lives. Rest in Peace, dear brother Brajesh.”

Sarada Diffenbaugh, founding MMS and MMC community member and former MMS principal shared: “Brajesh was and continues to be an inspiration to me. His kindness, integrity, fairness, pursuit of justice in issues big and small, and

thoughtful, articulate deliberations that always sought clarity and compromise, helped shape MMS' ethos. His disciplined life was an example of how one can hold heart, mind, and body with respect for the aim of self development. His dedication to his yogic spiritual practices, both in its moral code and their application to daily life, and in its formal sitting meditation, inspired peers and students to aim for peace through practice, focus, and effort. Brajesh was a remarkable man who gave generously of his many gifts, full heart, and brilliant mind.”

And finally, former MMS teacher and MMC community member Sadanand Mailliard offered this: “Simply put, Brajesh was a good person. I knew him for nearly 50 years and saw someone who made a lifelong effort to do the right thing. He was sincere and devoted in his relationships – a caring, highly empathetic human being. He was deeply committed to issues of equity and fairness, and he was a man of service and commitment. I think of him as a warrior; one who stands up for his principles. With intelligence, perseverance and sacrifice, he was central to the successes of MMC, MMS and MMI, answering the bell time after time, and giving fully of himself. Brajesh was a good person with a lifelong commitment and desire to do good and see the good in others.”

Brajesh's wife Alexandra “Xan” Hart also passed away quietly in her sleep on Tuesday, December 17, just three days after her beloved.

Brajesh was predeceased by his first wife Shyama. He is survived by daughters Carol Simmons and Gail Alderman, son Eric Alderman; grandchildren Brett Turchin, Madeline Graham, Shy Alderman, Elena Alderman, Camilo Arana; and great-granddaughter Aliyah Corder.

A *shraddha* (a ritual paying homage) was held on Friday, December 27. The family is also holding a memorial gathering at Mount Madonna on January 11, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Conference Center. All are invited to attend.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the [ACLU](#) or [Mount Madonna Center](#).

