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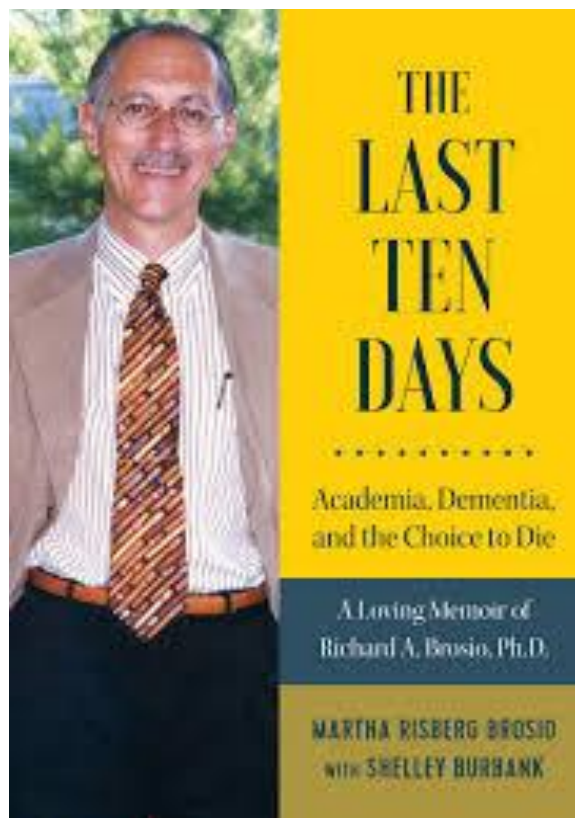
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The Last Ten Days is a powerful blend of three books in one that captures the love between two people, the powerful contributions of a radical democratic scholar, and poignant and anguished final days of a life well lived. In one volume, Martha Risberg Brosio and Shelley Burbank have essentially written three very readable and powerful stories that weave diverse strands into a cohesive and gripping one, accompanied by appropriate quotes from Richard Brosio's writings, all accomplished with grace, compassion, an attention to detail, and a review of critical and controversial issues in education and society.

This remarkable and moving love story about Risberg Brosio and her late husband Richard follows the last 10 days of his life, moving back and forth across the years of their time together, all woven together as an end-of-life diary. It is a lucid and well-written story of young love reunited; a tragic ending to this journey; and a memoir-review of his scholarly and teaching insights in the social



foundations of education that spanned more than three decades and that would eventually emerge as Richard's seminal work: *A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education* (1994).

But it is also a love affair with ideas embraced by a working-class, Italian-American son whose immigrant mother's roots from Turin, Italy, and father's working-class roots in Michigan's Upper Peninsula shaped his craft as a public intellectual who then taught and wrote about capitalism's profound and detrimental impact on education. Richard came from a long line of tradesmen and bricklayers from the Piedmont region of Italy, and he "retained an avid interest in and a strong affinity for Turinese history, philosophers, artists, musicians, and culture. This interest, in turn, wove itself like a bright, red thread into the richly designed and sturdy fabrics of his philosophy, understanding of society, and politics" (p. 33).

Richard never forgot his roots, very much like those Americans whom Mike Rose (2004) celebrates in his critically-acclaimed *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*. Richard's class and family context sensitized him to social, economic, and educational injustice, and a thirst for knowledge and truth about this society and its educational institutions. These concerns infused his work as a scholar and teacher who engaged with thousands of students over a teaching journey that included seven years as a secondary social studies teacher in San Diego and 28 years as a college professor in Muncie, IN, and Milwaukee.

The Last Ten Days is an anguished and joyful remembrance of one who suffered from and eventually died of Primary Progressive Aphasia, a form of dementia similar to Alzheimer's disease that targets the brain. It is a debilitating tragedy for anyone. One can imagine how it affected a passionate working-class, Italian-American intellectual who was forever "performing" for friends, students,

and colleagues with his love of learning and his critique of capitalism's assault on schools and institutions of higher education.

After setting the table and inviting guest readers to have a glimpse of what will come, the book is laid out as a reflection of the last 10 days of Richard's life when he chose with incredible courage and dignity to stop taking food and liquids. The 10-day framework allows the reader to move back and forth from Martha and Richard's high school years in Iron Mountain, Michigan, to their separate lives with marriage and children with others, to their reconnection decades later in Muncie, Indiana, when Richard taught at Ball State University, and Milwaukee where he finished his decades of teaching at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Mount Mary College – now University.

I was Richard's long-time friend and colleague in the social-historical foundations of education, and a fellow member of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) for 25 years. We read each other's book manuscripts, appeared on panels together at AESA, and spent countless hours discussing classroom pedagogy, educational and societal issues, and our writings. I have fond and deep memories of many lovely hours with Martha and Richard at their homes in Muncie and Milwaukee.

It is very important to take notice in this review of the totality of Richard Brosio's pursuit of his scholarly-teaching craft over decades in graduate school and as a public intellectual in three universities. His was a long but truly focused search for truth about the nature of society and its educational institutions, a relentless study over decades that had an impact with a potential audience of thousands that was tragically cut short by his debilitating disease.

Focusing on his decades-long pursuit of craft cannot diminish the power and profound

nature of what transpired in the last two years of his life or the final 10 days, or take away from Martha's courage, honesty, and tenacity as she lived alongside her loved one through these anguished moments. Yet these emotionally overwhelming moments remain a small part of my dear friend's life alongside the pursuit for knowledge that he continued year after year.

The book's Prologue sets the context for Richard and Martha's life together and his thoughts on the "good life," society, and education. The authors then share insights from his educational social analyses. It is most appropriate, therefore, to include their assessment of his thoughts on these matters. As they write, "[At Ball State] Inevitably the conversation would turn to politics – college politics, national, world. Richard's eyes would get that gleam ... and off he'd go, expounding on this or that, quoting from a recent article he'd read, drawing the rest of us into the orbit of intellectual curiosity, his passion for history, philosophy, education, and the arts" (p. viii). He engaged in a fire-in-the-belly search to understand the nature of the unequal and unjust society in which he lived and worked, and this passionate search carried him forward for decades.

The authors also address Richard's desire to teach others "to look beyond the easy answers and to question things such as the hegemony of capitalism and to consider other things such as the true meaning of democracy and the possibilities for democratic education" (p. ix). As a radical democrat and "highly engaged scholar of the Left," he wanted all people to be given the opportunity and means to pursue the good life, one

that included education, naturally, and appreciation of what he called 'high culture': drama, literature, music, painting, and other arts. He believed that well-educated citizens were those who understood their cultural heritage. He understood that dialogue

and community with others, appreciation of the arts, and the ability to reason helped individuals to make some sense of a chaotic world, to throw some light into the darkness and confusion. (p. 122)

The authors' review of Richard's ingredients of the "good life" offered in this book would have benefitted from a fuller elaboration of that term, to preempt readers' concerns that he was laying out the elitist notions of a privileged academic. As a radical public intellectual, he profoundly disagreed with any attempt to deny the "good life" to the working class.

Risberg Brosio and Burbank emphasize Richard's belief "in the necessity and importance of critical inquiry as opposed to accepting the status quo in the American education system which he viewed as reflective of the greater economic and political forces and systems at play in society" (p. 58). He strengthened this belief by immersing himself in the writings of Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Antonio Gramsci, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire and deepening his understanding of our capitalist political economy and education system.

Richard also recognized the critical contribution of the prominent American sociologist C. Wright Mills, the prolific scholar-activist and polemicist who greatly influenced the emergence of the American New Left in the 1960s. As a radical public intellectual, he was deeply influenced by the Mills's assertion that

The knowledgeable man in the genuine public ... understands that what he thinks and feels to be personal troubles are very often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by anyone individual but modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and

sometimes the structure of the entire society (2008, pp. 119-120).

In solidarity with Mills, *The Last Ten Days* states that Richard “dedicated himself to what he – and others – called the democratic project. He wanted to help construct a society where everyone, regardless of nationality, race, gender, socioeconomic status, or any other identification, would be able to live with dignity and to work on projects of their own devising, in other words, a true democracy” (p. 111).

After more than 50 years of reading in the social, historical, and philosophical foundations of education, I do not recall a book in these fields or in the field of education

more broadly that brings together matters of love, memoir, tragedy, and critical insights on the field in one volume. It is virtually unheard of to find critical insights about capitalism and education wrapped up in a love story. It reminds us that as we pursue our intellectual craft, first we are human beings living out our daily lives. We need tender moments. We thrive best in love. We grow. We produce. We contribute. And, we die, perhaps in the arms of a loved one, assured that we have done our best for our craft and students and for those who have held us. With the radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, Martha Risberg Brosio and Shelley Burbank remind us throughout this book that “Love, work, and knowledge are the wellsprings of our lives. They should also govern it.”

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About the Reviewer


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