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Legacy of Masters: Remarks on Life and Work with Professors Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner

Abstract

On January 25th, 2019, The University of South Florida sponsored an event to honor the legacy of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner as they retire after more than 85 years (combined) teaching. In this paper, research collaborators, students, and friends present their testimonials commemorating their shared lives with Professors Ellis and Bochner. A collection of short stories reveals "official" and "non-official" (in some cases very personal) experiences as they were lived through, inviting readers to see how academic intergenerational relationships might develop as contextually situated and morally important.

Keywords: legacy of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, intergenerational relationships, retirement.

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Dziedzictwo mistrzów: uwagi o życiu i pracy z Profesorami Carolyn Ellis i Arthurem P. Bochnerem

25 stycznia 2019 r., w Uniwersytecie Południowej Florydy miało miejsce uroczyste spotkanie poświęcone aktywności akademickiej Carolyn Ellis i Arthura Bochnera, którzy po ponad osiemdziesięciu pięciu latach (łącznie) pracy dydaktycznej przeszli na emeryturę. Tekst został przygotowany przez naukowych współpracowników, studentów oraz przyjaciół Profesorów Ellis i Bochnera, by upamiętnić i uhonorować Ich dzieło, i stanowi zbiór krótkich historii. Ukazuje on zarówno „oficjalne", jak i „nieoficjalne" (w niektórych wypadkach bardzo osobiste) doświadczenia związane z życiem i pracą Profesorów. Opowieści te zapraszają czytelników do świata akademickich relacji międzypokoleniowych, uwikłanych kontekstowo i ważnych z etycznego punktu widzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo Carolyn Ellis i Arthura Bochnera, relacje międzypokoleniowe, przejście na emeryturę.

In Quest of Meaning in (Academic) Life: From Personal Experience to Communal Values

(*Marcin Kafar*)

Hello Everybody! I'm Marcin Kafar and I came from Lodz, Poland to be with you this afternoon. We are celebrating master storytellers, so let me begin my presentation with recalling a seemingly insignificant episode. Here it is: Around three weeks ago, Carolyn, Art, and I enjoyed a lovely dinner in one of our favorite places in Tampa, a sushi restaurant near the USF [University of South Florida] campus. We ate delicious food and drank a little, but mostly *we talked*. The topics we discussed were common, perhaps even trivial. We talked about, for instance, differences in calculating electricity prices in the States and in Poland, organizing everyday life in the countryside, and taking care of our log cabins. After that dinner, while we were getting to Art's car parked near the restaurant entrance, he spontaneously announced: "It's high time to stop talking about 'work' and start talking about 'life'." This sentence lingered in my memory, and it's been resonating since then. Art, to paraphrase Paul Ricoeur (1967), gave me "rise to thought." Just to remind us, this famous aphoristic phrase described a relationship between a man and the symbol, the latter always "sets us thinking," in Ricoeur's words. As Jonathan Rée (2005: 21) once put it: "The purpose of thinking [is] not to gain knowledge, but to learn to consider the world in the light of our irremediable ignorance"; the effect of that process should be *searching for meanings in people's lives*.

When I got home, I wrote down Art's words, adding the following comment: "This is both intriguing and unsettling." Several days later, while preparing for

a more professional conversation with Carolyn and Art, I opened an email in which Carolyn invited several of us to contribute to the event in which we are participating now. At first, the title of the celebration lecture, *A Meaningful Academic Life: Indefinite, Amusing, Unsettling* sounded strange and yet strangely familiar. It took me a moment before I realized that Art had used the same word in his title—unsettling—as I had used in response to his expression opting "for" "life" and "against" "work." No wonder the coincidence was intriguing—as it was… *unsettling*.

I asked myself: Should I be amazed that we found interest in the same vocabulary? Was it a mere coincidence or, rather, the most natural way of reading the world when you and the other exist in the very same horizon of values? I quickly understood that those questions were rhetorical.

Thank you, Carolyn and Art, for creating for so many of us a horizon of shared values. We, narrative researchers and autoethnographers, place those values within *humanized social sciences*. Thank you for giving me personally a chance to be in this horizon together with you in the last decade. Thank you, my dear friends, for teaching and parenting me, and simply for being with me *at home* and *on the move*. And I hope, after all is said and done, that we still will be talking about "life" and "work" as merging fields of living a meaningful (academic) life. We must "keep the pressure on!" as Art shouts during the USF basketball games we attend together.

Thank you so much.

Make of Yourself a Light

(*Csaba Osvath*)

Greetings Everyone! My name is Csaba Osvath. With affection and gratitude, I would like to pay homage to my beloved professors, mentors, and friends —Dr. Carolyn Ellis and Dr. Art Bochner.

To summarize the essence of your influence in my life, as your student, I am reminded of the last teaching of the Buddha. It was a radical invitation requiring both vulnerability and courage. At the end of his life, the Buddha said to his disciples: "Make of yourself a light."

You both have recognized and nurtured this potential in all of us. In my case, you lit and kindled a light, giving fire to the cold ashes of my selfhood that sought passion, vocation, aliveness, and a beloved community within the academy. Becoming your student offered a home and a safe place where I could practice how to use this light wisely, to illuminate and nurture all sentient beings. Your concerns were never limited to how we should study and conduct research. Your real concern was how we should live a good life. In addition to the intellect, you trained our souls and our hearts, understanding that real education is an ethical practice. Your presence, your courses and teachings on love, loss, relationships, narrative

inquiry, and autoethnography provided a well-functioning healthcare system at the University of South Florida. We can't do without it.

Through your example, you revealed to us what it means to take seriously this vocation of becoming a source of light. As Victor Frankl (1986: 57) said, "What is to give light must endure burning." And perhaps for many of us, your retirement creates a dimension of pain, albeit a necessary pain. We cannot replace the light of your daily presence in the classrooms and on campus, but hopefully, as your students, we can learn to reflect your light and to use it to see things more deeply and more clearly.

A wise rabbi once asked his students how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun, for that was the exact time for a particular holy prayer.

"Is it when you can see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?" proposed one student.

"No," answered the rabbi.

"Is it when you can clearly see the lines on your palm?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

"Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell if it is a fig or an apple tree?"

"No," answered the rabbi once again.

"Then what is it?" the students demanded.

Looking intently at them, he said, "It is when you can look at the face of any man or woman, young or old, and see that they are your sisters or brothers. Until then, it is still night. It is still dark."

Thanks to you, Dr. Ellis and to Dr. Bochner, it is no longer night for many of us. Through a pedagogy of love and an orientation toward the pursuit of wisdom, you helped us to become sources of light, so we may too recognize, witness, and celebrate the "core reality and secret beauty" (Merton 1996: 104–141) of those we encounter.

And being in your presence today, sharing these words, I suddenly identify with the person in Mary Oliver's poem who witnesses the Buddha's last teaching. These words are becoming my words, as I glance at you next to me, looking at the crowd gathered here to celebrate your life and work.

…I am touched everywhere
by its ocean of yellow waves.
No doubt he thought of everything
that had happened in his difficult life.
And then I feel the sun itself
as it blazes over the hills,
like a million flowers on fire—
clearly I'm not needed,

yet I feel myself turning
into something of inexplicable value… (Oliver 1990: 4)

In your presence, we all—your friends, students, and family—experience this joyful transformation of "turning into something of inexplicable value." Through the benefits of autoethnography and narrative inquiry, you helped us to discover our true nature. You revealed to us the "inexplicable value" of being alive and being in caring relationships. You called us to celebrate the values and blessings in our impermanence and interdependence. We offer now our thanks.

Finding Heart and Soul

(*Lisa P. Spinazola*)

Dearest Carolyn, Art, colleagues, and friends,

The story I'd like to share with you began eleven years ago, when I walked into my first community college classroom, two dimensional, body and brain, conditioned to believe students don't need much else in order to be successful. I was a non-traditional student, learning what I could, surviving as I was, and earned an AA in Liberal Arts and an AS in Counseling and Human Services before transferring to the University of South Florida. I planned on studying social work and believed an undergraduate degree in Communication would benefit the counselor I knew I'd eventually become. The undergraduate advisor, after hearing my future goals, "strongly" suggested I take classes, any classes I could, with Dr. Ellis and/or Dr. Bochner. I took note and immediately enrolled in Carolyn's class, "Communicating Emotions" and Art's class, "Love and Communication." It was not until I sat in their classrooms that I began feeling like more than just a body and brain. I was slowly reminded of my heart and soul. They spoke a language I longed to hear and immediately recognized—a language of connection and love.

Once upon a time, I used to tell my stories of suffering, dismay, abandonment, to any who would listen. I'd pour everything out onto them, purging the chaos from my mind, dumping out my anger and hurt for all to see and hear. After others listened to me, cried with me, hugged me, I'd walk away filled with some relief and a sense of validation. I wasn't crazy. I knew the things my parents subjected me to were wrong, vile, brutal, inexcusable, unforgivable… and others agreed, asked how I survived it all, marveled at how I had managed to become kind, loving, and caring in spite of it all. I bathed in their validation of me.

My old way of telling stories served a purpose, to have a witness, to expel from my brain and body the pain. But it was an incomplete process. Having a witness is important and having the opportunity to begin telling a story that is pure chaos and incomprehensible is a start (DeSalvo 1999; Goodman 2012; Pennebaker 1997). When others shook their heads in disbelief, I knew I had survived a story most had

never heard before let alone could offer guidance on how to move through. It helped to know my lack of knowing how to move forward was not my fault and could even be considered normal (Rosenthal 2003). This knowing helped me cope. But without reflexivity and thoughtfulness, I was missing out on the next steps I could take to find healing and maybe closure (Goodall 2000).

Art's and Carolyn's classes offered opportunities to explore topics such as love, loss, neglect, abandonment, grief, and death. Revisiting my first love story with an expanded knowledge base allowed me to experience firsthand the power of narrative reframing, how we find room in old stories for new understandings, opening space for forgiveness, gratitude, and grace, not only for others but also for ourselves (Kiesinger 2002).

I learned the key to healing through writing is to deeply feel, explore, and express our feelings about moments in our past as we link the past and the present (DeSalvo 1999). I remember learning in Carolyn's emotions class that I did not have to delve only into the darkness; I could acknowledge the light. I could acknowledge the good times and happy moments. In the frightening forest of my youth—the one I had been painting with broad, harsh, angry strokes—there were tiny, lush clearings where the sun peeked through and where moments of tenderness, laughter, and love lingered waiting to be remembered. I am convinced that being in Carolyn's class is what made it possible to open the door to forgiving my father, a man I once avoided at all costs, a man from whom I felt the need to protect myself and my children, and who now is a loving, vital part of our everyday lives.

Through stories we invent and reinvent ourselves, make past experiences present, and have the chance to save ourselves (O'Brien 2009). Art and Carolyn did not just think *about* the stories I and other students told, but thought *with* our stories (Frank 2013). They taught "about" *and* modeled "how to," demonstrating care, compassion, and reflexivity in action. Noticing the joy, passion, care, and connection exuding from both these professors opened the door for me to reconsider my next steps.

As a student in their classes, I realized teaching can be considered a form of counseling, making room for personal growth and improvement in life satisfaction. I now know the power of listening for what is NOT being said; engaging with students and meeting them where they are and not where we expect or want them to be; and gracefully acknowledging we are human, imperfect, and make mistakes. I did not pursue Social Work after all and instead stayed on in Communication, absorbing from them everything I could. I took classes in "Social Construction," "Narrative," "Communication in Close Relationships," "Trauma and Interviewing," and "Autoethnography," earning first a Bachelor's degree, then a Master's degree, and finally a PhD.

Classes with Dr. Ellis and Dr. Bochner did more than teach us how to observe or study life. We learned how to live better lives and become better versions of ourselves. As an MA student, I wrote my way out of an on-again, off-again,

unhealthy, unfulfilling relationship while storying my way into becoming a loving, accepting, supportive, and nurturing mother, doing this from scratch as I experienced my own mother as none of these things. As a PhD student, I narrated my way through the aftermath of a car accident that caused a brain bleed and intermittent crippling pain and began to face the stifling stories I live by regarding body image.

Today, I am fulfilling a dream I never knew I had. I am a teacher, and as a teacher I too weave narrative, storytelling, emotions, compassion, and witnessing into my curriculum regardless of the course content. I find my students are engaged and connected to me and each other as a result, creating opportunities for deeper understanding of the subjects I am teaching. My students open up and share their personal struggles and triumphs; they laugh, cry, form friendships, and talk about feeling like they have been part of a family when class wraps up for the final time. In these moments, I know I have succeeded in emulating my mentors.

It is impossible to share how Art and Carolyn changed my life, were invaluable influences, and made the world a better place for so many of us without addressing how the department they were instrumental in building is now exploring a new direction which ignores their incalculable contributions and excludes their scholarship and interests. Not only are my heroes retiring but subjects they pioneered and taught, classes that had a profound impact on my life altering my trajectory, are no longer available to incoming undergrads. I understand change is inevitable, but at what cost? *How can we claim to honor and pay tribute to people while simultaneously erasing their influence and legacy?* I don't know how or if the department will reconcile this quandary or tension; I only know I will be a walking, talking tribute to Art's and Carolyn's teachings, honoring the way they live their lives, loving, giving, encouraging, and challenging each of us to do our best.

Art and Carolyn have been with me from the beginning—teaching, guiding, and mentoring me. Their influence in my life has made it possible for me to see myself in new ways—forgive my father, become a better mother to my now-grown kids, shed toxic relationships, reevaluate priorities, and make the kind of difference in others' lives these two mentors have made in mine. Because of Dr. Carolyn Ellis and Dr. Arthur Bochner, I found courage; I found my voice. Because of them, I move forward and am whole—body, brain, heart, and soul.

Making Narrative Sense

(*Erin Scheffels*)

Hi Everyone! I'm Erin Scheffels and I'm going to take a similar approach to the other folks who spoke today and tell a little story about when I first learned of Art and Carolyn, to show you the kinds of discoveries you make when you realize that they exist as people.

When I was a student in my master's program at Central Michigan University I was plugging along; it was hard work and my dad had just had a stroke, so I was taking care of him. But I wasn't really interested in pursuing anything further in education. A PhD for me was a no-go. I thought most of the research was incredibly, painfully boring, and I didn't connect to anything. I'd also attempted to write a personal story in one of my graduate classes—just in the beginning of the paper, as a foreword—and was told that it was an absolute no.

And then I took an "Interpersonal Communication" seminar, and in that class we were assigned a book called, *Dialectical Approaches to Studying Interpersonal Relationships* by Baxter & Montgomery. I read a chapter by Art, Carolyn and Lisa [Tillmann-Healy] entitled, "Mucking Around Looking for Truth" (Bochner, Ellis, Tillmann-Healy 1998). On the day that we had to sign up for chapters to present to class, I saw that title and felt, "This one! Me!" I read it and thought, "Wow, if this is something people are doing, maybe I do want to pursue a PhD."

Soon after, I went to the NCA [National Communication Association] conference in San Francisco and got the courage to go meet Art and Carolyn for the "Scholars' Office Hours" session. They were so kind to me, as they listened to me and to my story. I felt encouraged, and I decided to apply to this program at USF. My mentors at CMU [Central Michigan University] encouraged me to also apply to other programs, but I already knew I only wanted to go to USF for these reasons here [gestures toward honorees, Art and Carolyn]. I waited and waited and waited and finally got a call, and it was from Art. On that day I'd written on Facebook (you know how those memories come up): "OMG, the Bob Dylan of qualitative research just called me!" I was so excited. This call changed everything, including my direction. I did get in to USF. I did get an assistantship. And I did complete my PhD.

What Art and Carolyn have taught me is to make narrative sense of my writing, which is big for me because I love writing and that's going to carry me forward. But they also taught me to make narrative sense of the chaos in my life.

Legacy of Love

(*Lisa M. Tillmann*)

Good afternoon. I'm Lisa Tillmann, professor and chair of Critical Media and Cultural Studies at Rollins College. Our students research, write, shoot, and edit social issue documentary films, as do I.

Although Art and Carolyn did not teach me the technical skills of filmmaking, they did—and DO—model how to research, compose, edit, teach, and mentor. They also exemplify how to partner, parent, live, and love, inviting each of us to become ever-fuller versions of ourselves.

My years at the University of South Florida (USF) span from 1993–98. During that time, I may have taken every class offered by Art and Carolyn, essentially

majoring in them. Art directed my dissertation about a network of gay male friends—a project as transformative as any experience in my life.

I entered the PhD program in Communication at age 22. A small-town girl from rural Minnesota, I had heard of neither Art nor Carolyn and knew exactly nothing about narrative ethnography and autoethnography.

Auto, self. Ethnos, culture. Graph, writing. Narratives showing the recursive relationship between individual lived experience and social, cultural, and political systems and problems.

During my time at USF, narrative, ethnographic, performance, media, and cultural studies blended—beautifully, if not always seamlessly. Only by going to conferences and getting immersed in literatures did I begin to apprehend the *singularity* of the USF tapestry. Nationally and internationally, prospective graduate students wanting to explore the social world and to compose compelling stories aimed at rendering that world more humane, empathic, and just viewed our program as THE PLACE to do this work.

By the time I graduated, I knew exactly what it meant to have earned a PhD in Communication from USF.

Art and Carolyn played central roles in that clarity. They taught ground-breaking, life-changing classes. They mentored the next generation of scholar-storytellers. And they wrote, wrote, wrote, edited, and published—and assisted *us* in publishing—an astonishing number of texts.

Yesterday (1/24/19), Carolyn's Google Scholar profile indicated that 26,157 works cite her publications. It has been about 18 hours since I checked, so the number likely has ticked upward. Art doesn't have a profile that compiles results, but I counted 22 different authored or coauthored works with more than 100 citations each, three of them with more than a thousand. Art and Carolyn's book chapter *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity* (Bochner, Ellis 2000) has 5174 citations, an impressive *career*'s impact in just one of their publications.

Those data, remarkable as they are, fail to capture the breadth and depth of their impact. Earlier this month, scholars gathered at a symposium dedicated to Art's and Carolyn's legacy[1]. Words, voices, gazes, and tears conveyed unbounded gratitude, devotion, and love—as much love as I *ever* have experienced in one place.

For me, their legacy *is* love. Scholarship, pedagogy, and ways of life about love, of love, and for love—for each of us, for our fellow travelers, and for this world.

In my life, and at USF, Art and Carolyn are irreplaceable. At the same time, I put my trust in their successors to keep their loving legacy alive. For the rest of my career, I hope to tell my best narrative researchers and writers, my most beloved and loving students, that USF is still *the place* to study, live, and love.

[1] "The Symposium on Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry: Honoring the Legacy of Carolyn Ellis & Art Bochner" was held at The Dolphin Beach Resort, St. Pete Beach, Florida on January 3–5, 2019.

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