

# the community

## A Swan Song (or a Fanfare): Some Thoughts of an Institute Director After 30 Years of Service

Gary B. Melton

University of Colorado School of Medicine and University of the Free State

**S**everal years ago, Prof. Randy Pausch, a young superstar in computer science, gave a much-discussed lecture at Carnegie Mellon. In an address that was advertised as his last, Pausch entertained a packed hall with his stories about his fulfillment of some rather spectacular childhood dreams (e.g., experiencing zero gravity; becoming an Imagineer for Disney).

A leader in the creation of virtual realities (the stuff of which movie special effects are made), Pausch knew how to grab an audience's attention. His depiction of his childhood aspirations and their mostly adult fulfillment was sufficiently entertaining and the insights were sufficiently touching that the genre of *last lecture* became the focal point of much conversation. Indeed, the Carnegie Mellon lecture itself has been viewed by about 15 million people on You Tube.

Fortuitously, Pausch's purportedly last lecture actually was the first in a series of "last" lectures, and he made the round of talk shows to promote

---

This article is based on the closing address at the Fourth Greenville Family Symposium (sponsored by the American Orthopsychiatric Association, Clemson University, Haruv Institute, the International Family Therapy Association, and the International Society for Child Indicators), at University Center in Greenville, South Carolina, in March 2012. The author has exceptional experience in the challenges and rewards of work in interdisciplinary centers and institutes. Besides serving for 30 years as the founding director of interdisciplinary programs at, respectively, the University of Nebraska, the University of South Carolina, and Clemson University, Melton spent the first 8 years of his career as an intern or junior faculty member in similar entities in Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Virginia. While a faculty member at the University of Nebraska, he worked for approximately 6 months in another interdisciplinary center—the Norwegian Center for Child Research—as a Fulbright professor. He has at other times held appointments in interdisciplinary units at the University of Minnesota (Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs), where he was an adjunct professor, and the University of the Free State in South Africa (Centre for Psychology and Law), where he is currently an extraordinary professor. After moving to South Carolina, Melton also served for 7 years as president of Childwatch International, a Norway-based global network of approximately 50 centers for child research. Newly based in the University of Colorado's Kempe Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, he is associate director for community engagement and prevention, professor of pediatrics (University of Colorado School of Medicine), and professor of community and behavioral health (Colorado School of Public Health).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gary B. Melton, Kempe Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, The Gary Pavilion, Anschutz Medical Campus, 13123 East 16th Avenue, Aurora, CO 80045. Electronic mail may be sent to [gary.melton@ucdenver.edu](mailto:gary.melton@ucdenver.edu).

---

### *In The Community...*

---

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | A Swan Song (or a Fanfare):<br>Some Thoughts of an Institute<br>Director After 30 Years of<br>Service |
| 11 | So Close and Yet So Far<br>Away: Social Class, Social<br>Exclusion, and Mental Health<br>Practice     |
| 17 | Holding Accountability<br>Accountable: A Cost-Benefit<br>Analysis of Achievement Test<br>Scores       |
- 

**Earn continuing education  
credits (CE) by reading all of  
the articles in *The  
Community* and answering  
the self-assessment  
questions in each article.  
See form at end of section.**

the resulting best-selling book. Pausch did give his remarkably upbeat first “last lecture” after he was diagnosed with an aggressive, incurable liver cancer. The lecture was intended to be a truly final statement of the reflections of a valued colleague in a supportive intellectual community. Pausch was at last freed in mortality from the boundaries of discipline and rank that limit access to the deepest and most creative ideas even of the most honored members of the academy.

### *The more common form of the genre is a lecture composed as if it were one’s last*

However, the more common form of the genre is a lecture composed as if it were one’s last—a valedictory as the speaker moves from one phase and venue of life to another. Notwithstanding Pausch’s example, a typical last lecture is less like a high-minded Socratic last testament than, say, a low-key version of Mr. Washington’s farewell address (still, of course, an atmospheric aspiration) or, even more commonly, a proclamation akin to the announcement that “you won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore” (a decidedly less lofty benchmark).

I certainly do not intend this article (or the lecture on which it was based) to be my final words. Hence, this article is not presented as a marker of my denouement. Nonetheless, I am at a point of transition, maybe from one career to another—at a minimum, from one extended phase of life to another. When I awoke on February 1, 2012, for the first time in about 30 years I was not the director (usually having been the founding director) of a relatively large, mostly grant-funded interdisciplinary university-based program. At least

as far as my own acquaintances extend, I held such a position longer than any other director of an analogous center or institute on children, families, or communities anywhere in the world. (At the conclusion of this article, I will give some brief impressions about the reason for the common instability of such programs and the associated brevity of their directors’ employment.)

As was true when I began my career in academia, however, I am now a “regular” faculty member in

another interdisciplinary program. In my new position as a professor in the University of Colorado’s Kempe Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, there are several important changes from my professional life more than 30 years ago. I have accrued three or four decades of seniority, a little fame (thus far unaccompanied by criminal indictments), and the cushions of soft landings facilitated by golden parachutes both for my wife and colleague Robin Kimbrough-Melton and for me—the first time (at least to my knowledge) that anyone has actually paid to get rid of us! In short, I now have assets enabling me for the first time that I can recall largely to set my own agenda.

Thus, I have been liberated from some of the daily, often existential demands of institute leadership for the first time in three decades. Hence, the possibility of a new career is not merely a metaphor, although my intention is less to adopt a new vocation than to concentrate my efforts on topics and strategies more profound and

#### Questions for Self-Assessment

1. According to *legal realists*, what is the purpose of law?
2. Melton argues that *universality* is the core idea in international human rights law. Explain.
3. Why does Melton emphasize *psychological-mindedness* rather than *psychology* in his analysis of the application of human rights?
4. What is the *fundamental attribution error*?
5. What is Melton’s explanation for the common brevity of term of employment of directors of institutes and centers associated with child, family, and community issues?

certainly more interesting and enjoyable than administrivia.

In a rough analogue to the half-empty/half-full debate (or perhaps the less-filling/tastes-great variant), readers are free as they wish to conceive of these remarks as my last lecture or my first—a swan song (a valedictory address) proclaiming whatever insights that I have generated or a fanfare (an inaugural address) describing the phenomena that I want to explore more deeply.

#### It Would Be Funny If It Weren’t So Absurd

In the year or so from the time that I began seriously considering a job change until Robin and I settled into our new home, I gave much thought to the nature of university-based, public-service-oriented institutes’ work, my own contributions, and their import, however transitory. These questions were particularly salient as we prepared to move and in that context reviewed files showing the nature of my activities over the years. Although this inquiry stimulated many warm

memories of important accomplishments and rewarding collaborations, the search through my notes also reminded me of a few disputes and a larger number of failures that I'd repressed. Such documents starkly demonstrated how little progress was made on some issues despite many years of effort, whether within the university bureaucracy or the broader body politic.

*Thoughtful innovation too often succumbs to mindless application of civil service rules, faculty manuals, and mandated but inapposite and premature experimental designs*

No experience was more personally deflating, however, than finding the file that reminded me how much attention that I had once given to the collection and sharing of cartoons. My file showed that I had gradually forsaken this practice during the time that I'd been in South Carolina, until I simply stopped it more than a decade ago. In retrospect, the absurd had become sufficiently commonplace that it had ceased to be funny.

Much of my energy was invested in seemingly perennial struggles to finance activities that are or should be at the very heart of the university's mission and indeed the community's responsibilities. As a result, too often my creative effort was diverted from public service per se to administrative gamesmanship. I spent far too many hours in often unsuccessful efforts to ensure that due reinforcement (both social and tangible) was provided to the faculty and staff involved in family and community studies and related public service.

Perhaps the most maddening experience, however, was the constant need to overcome the strictures illogically imposed in the name of *accountability* by guilds and

bean-counters in both funding agencies and the academy itself. Paradoxically, such arbitrary procedures and classifications often impede the implementation of creative strategies in addressing overarching but inadequately considered problems of our time—the *raison d'être* for unconventional structures like centers and institutes. Thoughtful innovation too often succumbs to mindless applica-

tion of civil service rules, faculty manuals, and funder- or manager-imposed inapposite and premature experimental designs, a predilection given greater power by the current obsession with “evidence-based” technologies.

Of course, some colleagues thrive in this environment, at least for a time. Others are rendered helpless in a hostile or simply unsupportive environment. Some, like Robin and me, finally recognize that it is time to go, that it has been too long since the cartoons were funny. We see missed opportunities and eventually begin to look westward and skyward toward more exotic settings on the great, ultimately mile-high frontier.

Why Psychological-Mindedness Matters

*The Importance of Subjective Experience*

There is obviously more than a little cynicism in these initial comments. Although there is also more than a little truth in the account that I have related so far, it is of course not the whole story. This so-called last lecture—or, if you will, final reflections

—is designed to give a smattering of Melton's greatest hits, of ideas and actions that were brought to life in centers and institutes, structures that at their best provide focal points for the generation and sharing of collective experience among people of diverse backgrounds.

About 20 years ago at the American Psychological Association meeting, I gave an invited address that was subtitled, “Human Rights in Psychological Jurisprudence.” The lead title was, “The Law Is a Good Thing (Psychology Is, Too).” In retrospect, a better title may have been, “Psychological-Mindedness Is a Good Thing (Psychology? Eh, Not So Good!).”

Placing myself squarely within the tradition of legal realism, I began the APA lecture with the premise that “law is intended to promote human welfare”<sup>1</sup>—that it is “truly ... a good thing that confirms the worth of humanity—that indeed gives official recognition to each citizen's unique personality—and that promotes a sense of community ... by (a) announcing the norms of the community and thus reifying the values embedded in the culture and (b) establishing structures that create or sustain social behavior consistent with those values. ... By the *proclamation* as well as the *guarantee* of the interests that are most fundamental to our identity, law serves to sustain deference to those interests ... [and thus] to give practical meaning to the aspirations of the people.”<sup>2</sup>

Careful adherence to these purposes requires that *authorities*—in a democratic society, purportedly most of us—*take people seriously*:

...People all over the world value the law when it treats them with respect—when it offers them a voice in a context in which they are treated with politeness and dignity in a state of equality. ... Taking people

<sup>1</sup>Gary B. Melton, *The Law Is a Good Thing (Psychology Is, Too)*, 16 LAW & HUM. BEHAV. 381, 383 (1992) (emphasis omitted).

<sup>2</sup>*Id.* at 384.

seriously requires more, though, than a process that is just. It also requires attention to the everyday experience of the citizenry. If the law is to confirm the importance of the individual, then the meaning of the ideas in the law should match common understanding, the assumptions in the law should not falsify or mystify experience, and the law should protect those interests that are most critical subjectively to maintenance of dignity.<sup>3</sup>

Put colloquially, taking people seriously means that they are treated like *anybody* and *somebody*. Being treated like *anybody* means being accepted and respected as a person, no matter one's age and social background. Ultimately, the core idea in international human rights law is *universality*. In both logic and practice, respect for human dignity has little meaning if it does not apply to every human being. For example, in Christian teaching (as in other great religious traditions), rights belong to every child of God ("the least of these"), including those who are otherwise most vulnerable to exclusion or mistreatment.

The seminal document in human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, expresses this idea in its title (*Universal Declaration*) and its basic principle that "*everyone* has the right to recognition *every-*

of human rights—not just *who* is considered to be a person but also *what* a person is owed. Three constructs are overarching: the right to personality (to be somebody), the right to personal security, and the right to grow up in a family environment embraced by a supportive community. These constructs give meaning to the principle that the aspects of our collective experience that effectively define an individual's humanity are *a fortiori* entitlements of all human beings.

Like some of the most fundamental rights in the U.S. Constitution (most famously, *privacy*), these axiomatic constructs in international human rights law are *penumbral*. They both bridge and permeate the many particular concepts that are expressly noted in human rights documents. Conceptually, the most fundamental of all is the *right to personality*—to being identified as *anybody* and treated like *somebody*, a person with a unique identity protected and nurtured in the security of a family environment. This identity is expressed, in the words of the Universal Declaration (art. 29, C; 1), in "the community, in which alone the free and full development of. ... personality is possible."

Put simply, rights have no practical meaning outside a community inclusive of intimate, family relationships, all as subjectively experienced.

This principle has never been more elegantly expressed than in Justice Blackmun's dissenting opinion in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, in which he argued that criminalization of homosexual conduct was constitutionally prohibited. Consider these excerpts

about the nature of family-related rights:

1. We protect [rights associated with the family] not because they contribute, in some direct and general way to the general public welfare, but because they form so central a part of an individual's life.
2. And so we protect the decision whether to marry precisely because marriage "is an association that promotes a way of life, not causes; a harmony in living, not faiths...."
3. We protect the decision whether to have a child because parenthood alters so dramatically an individual's self-determination, not because of demographic considerations or the Bible's command to be fruitful and multiply.
4. And we protect the family because it contributes so powerfully to the happiness of individuals, not because of a preference for stereotypical households.
5. ...The "ability independently to define one's identity that is central to any concept of liberty" cannot truly be exercised in a vacuum; we all depend on the "emotional enrichment from close ties with others."
6. Only the most willful blindness could obscure the fact that sexual intimacy is "a sensitive, key relationship of human existence, central to family life, community welfare, and the development of a human personality."
7. The fact that individuals define themselves in a significant way through their intimate ... relationships with others suggests, in a Nation as diverse as ours, that there may be many "right" ways of conducting these relationships....
8. I can only hope that ... the Court soon will ... conclude that depriving individuals of the right to choose for themselves how to conduct their Nation's history [could do more harm] than tolerance of nonconformity could ever do.<sup>4</sup>

In effect, Justice Blackmun argued, the Constitution's import is not bounded by the literal content of its terms. Rather, the meaning is found in the search for the psycho-

## *Ultimately, the core idea in international human rights law is universality*

where as a *person* before the law" (emphasis added). Indeed, the word *everyone* appears 30 times in the Declaration's 30 articles, with the commitment to universality often being further emphasized by use of *all* to express particular articles' scope.

Being treated like *somebody* indicates the universality of the content

<sup>3</sup>*Id.* at 385 (italics omitted).

<sup>4</sup>*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186, 199 (1986) (Blackmun, J., dissenting), as excerpted in Gary B. Melton, *It's All About Relationships! The Psychology of Human Rights*, 80 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 161, 168 (2010).



logical equivalents of the profoundly human concerns that the Founders sought to address.

### So Why Focus on Psychological-Mindedness, Not Psychology Itself?

#### *It Ain't Rocket Science*

So if the content of human rights and, correspondingly, the characteristics of humane settings are defined in relation to subjective experience, then why do I say that psychological-mindedness but not psychology is at their core? The answer is found, by illustration, in the quote from Justice Blackmun. The issues at stake are so fundamental, so intimately connected to the human condition, that they are discernible through logical, moral,

The vision that was embedded in our work was grand, but it was also mundane. It was not grandiose; it was, we learned, fully achievable. Strong Communities “applied our highest aspirations to the seemingly inconsequential actions of everyday life. Communities in which children feel safe, in which they are heard, in which they and their parents are treated with respect, and in which there are strong norms of caring and mutual assistance would be fine places to live.”<sup>5</sup>

Such attributes are *goods in themselves*, logically embedded in the quality of life. Although susceptible to empirical study and undoubtedly related to many other positive outcomes, their moral value is not contingent. As goods in themselves—fundamental elements of human

rights—an assertion that is given proof by the mounting evidence of the pervasiveness of effects of neighborhood quality on child well-being.

Conversely, judicial and administrative decisions that have been most contrary to psychological research and theory generally have signified such an extraordinary ignorance of—or perhaps disdain for—human experience that the bare rudiments of empathy should have led to different assumptions and different results:

[For example, a] court should be able, on its own, to discern that a dragnet canine search of schoolchildren, complete with strip searches of selected students, differs qualitatively from mundane school activities in its intrusiveness. [The late Chief Justice] William Rehnquist should not have needed a Stanford education (although one wishes that he had used it) to determine that [juveniles’] “custody” in a fortress-like secure detention facility is substantially more restrictive than “custody” in the typical American family.

[Accordingly, the] distinguishing feature of psychological jurisprudence is not that it relies on social science evidence (although it often may do so) but instead that it uses subjective experience as the unit of analysis. .... Ironically, adoption of a psychological perspective might result ultimately in less use of social science evidence, because courts [and other authorities] would be less disposed to look for rationales (and thus to posit empirical assumptions) to justify intrusions on the fundamental rights of disadvantaged groups. ....

[It is likely] that psychological inquiry would diminish the now-too-frequent instances of courts’ [and other authorities’] directly contradicting social reality through legal fictions—thus applying a double assault on personhood by mystification of experience and rationalization of limitations on exercise of rights.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Armchair Psychoanalysis Is Popular, But ...*

The tendency to go beyond empathy to “psychologize” an understanding of phenomena that in their

## *The Constitution’s meaning is found in the search for the psychological equivalents of the profoundly human concerns that the Founders sought to address*

and spiritual inquiry. In other words, they are at the juncture of philosophy and psychology.

The experience in our Strong Communities initiative for community-wide primary prevention of child abuse and neglect was illustrative. Using just one outreach worker per town, we wanted to ensure that the everyday settings of community life—the places where we live, study, work, worship, and play—were so respectful of, and attentive to, the people within them that all children and all parents would both individually and collectively know that whenever they had reason to celebrate, worry, or grieve, someone would notice and someone would care.

rights—merely the experience that they exist is morally, legally, and politically important. Although such experiences are often related to socially significant goals, we need not and often should not look further, because our interest is not grounded in such instrumental effects. Frankly, the test scores and other markers of youth achievement and ultimate conventional adult success on which our society has become fixated are trivial when caring communities fully respect human

<sup>5</sup>Gary B. Melton, *Treating Children Like People: A Framework for Research and Advocacy*, 34 J. CLIN. CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHOL. 646, 656 (2005).

<sup>6</sup>Melton, *supra* note 1, at 385-86 & 388.

essence are moral issues is thus problematic because it often steers decision makers away from straightforward application of moral principles. It is also troubling because the assessment is often empirically inadequate. Like the general public, mental health professionals are prone to make the *fundamental attribution error*—to overlook statistically powerful situational factors and instead to assume, typically incorrectly, that behavior is primarily the product of individual motivation. The big although oft-disregarded message of contemporary social science is that situations typically matter much more than do personal traits.

Because of its potential to guide social policies in more productive directions, this core concept in social psychology may be the most important contribution of social science in the past half-century. Unfortunately, however, there is ample evidence that Americans continue to misperceive *social problems* as predominantly *personal failures*, whether of clients or patients on the one hand or of health and human service professionals on the other.

For example, research has convincingly demonstrated, on one hand, substantial neighborhood effects (problems of the physical,

most directly responsive to socioeconomic conditions. Nonetheless, child protection efforts continue usually to be aimed at particular “high-risk” families, selected on the bases of personal characteristics, and in those instances typically to rely on some form of counseling or parent education.

Analogously, academic commentators nearly uniformly attribute the well-documented mismatch between the results of mental health treatment research and the practices employed in conventional mental health services to failures in effective management of clinicians. In that regard, researchers and administrators in or linked to mental health agencies have failed to see “the proverbial elephants in the room: (a) the stunning and long-increasing prevalence of child mental health problems in the United States ... and (b) the even more stunning and also long-increasing difficulty in providing parents and other caregivers with the support needed to promote children’s mental health and to prevent and ameliorate their mental health problems .... In the face of these powerful social forces, merely tweaking the mechanisms of quality improvement and assurance ... will not take the child mental health sys-

tem beyond a point of marginal social relevance. .... [Instead,] mental health professionals and organizations should be joining diligently and energetically with other sectors of society (not just professional helping services) to strengthen informal connections among people and

to facilitate neighbors’ help for one another.”<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, the *raison d’être* of the centers and institutes that I have directed and indeed my personal goal have been to change *institutions* and *settings*, not *individuals*. Hence, we *enable* and *support* much more than we *persuade*. We seek to create institutions that treat people humanely and respectfully and that permit—or even “demand” (in an environmental sense)—people of good will to enrich the lives of all around them and to buffer the challenges, big and small, that life brings each of us at times of celebration, anxiety, or grief.

Reflecting on the worldview of the *exceptional volunteers* (those who were frequently at the forefront of community change and neighborly care in Strong Communities, my hunch is that few, if any, of them perceive themselves as engaged in “therapeutic” change, even though most, if not all, recognized their effectiveness in making things a bit easier for the people whom they serve in their daily lives. Although it is professional heresy to say so, the reality is that the personal change that may come from individual clinical services (or individual supervision in workplaces) is usually trivial in relation to the effects of the “climate” in the places where we live, work, study, worship, or play. To repeat Eleanor Roosevelt’s stirring words, “Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless ... rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

### *The big although oft-disregarded message of contemporary social science is that situations typically matter much more than do personal traits*

social, and economic environments) on rates of maltreatment and, on the other hand, the realistic weakness of psychological factors. Moreover, depression is the psychological factor that is most strongly related to child maltreatment and probably also the psychological phenomenon

tem beyond a point of marginal social relevance. .... [Instead,] mental health professionals and organizations should be joining diligently and energetically with other sectors of society (not just professional helping services) to strengthen informal connections among people and

<sup>7</sup>Gary B. Melton, *Putting the “Community” Back into “Mental Health”: The Challenge of a Great Crisis in the Health and Well-Being of Children and Families*, 37 ADMIN. & POL’Y IN MENT. HEALTH 173, 174 (2010).

## The End of the Last Lecture: Universities' Affirmative Roles and Duties

### *The Celebration of Great Lives and Great Ideas*

In the end (the most significant position in a last lecture or, for that matter, any lecture!), universities' most important roles, reflected in their historic entanglement with societal religious institutions, are to be custodians, interpreters, publicists, and agents of those values and beliefs that Mr. Lincoln described in his first inaugural address as "the better angels of our nature." Although the division of responsibility is not rigid (as most notably illustrated by seminaries), churches

### *Universities' most important roles are to be custodians, interpreters, publicists, and agents of those values and beliefs that are 'the better angels of our nature'*

and temples are the venues for the expression and study of revealed truths, whether by divine gifts or spiritual quests; universities are the repositories of the insights emanating from the application of such truths to lived experience.

The power of collective experience—stated differently, the power of ideas—is the most important reason why universities are good bases from which to work in communities, even though some other aspects of academic culture are maddening. In turn, as a practical matter, the institutional mission to expand collective wisdom is the most important reason for universities to reject parochial instincts driven by the restrictive guilds of the academy and instead to embrace globalism,

multiculturalism, and Jeffersonian equality. Our individual influence rests, often imperceptibly, on the contributions of not only our colleagues

but also those who are far from us in time and space. "Thinking globally, acting locally" is indeed at the foundation of effective community work.

Too often, however, academicians have overlooked the wisdom that can be found in the communities with which we work. Universities should indeed facilitate and celebrate the truths found in the lives of the philosophers, statespersons, scientists, and artists of global and historical renown. However, we should also facilitate and celebrate the achievements and insights of the

greats (as in Strong Communities, the exceptional volunteers) who walk among us every day, those who *believe* that "people shouldn't have to ask," who "naturally" behave accordingly, and who quietly lead others in building and sustaining a sense of community. Their recognition comes daily in smaller, maybe silent ways—in the affirmation that comes from others, be they friends or family who trust in great human beings' goodness, effort, and skills, or strangers who are surprised and warmed by their incidental hosts' hospitality.

My father's life was an example. Dad never achieved "success" in the way that it is usually conceived in our society. He was a furniture manufacturer's representative (AKA

traveling salesman) who died in his mid-50s, heavily in debt after extended disability because of a series of heart attacks and a stroke. Although his work had required him to drive 1,000 miles per week during much of his adult life, he did not board an airplane until after I had finished graduate school and welcomed a second child (also my parents' second grandchild), in that instance a half-continent from my parents' home. He never went abroad, although my parents sacrificed so that I could do so when I was in high school. I doubt if his name appeared in the newspaper at any time other than his birth, marriage, and death, but he spread the word about my own and my siblings' achievements to anyone who would listen.

Much like the exceptional volunteers in Strong Communities, Dad was active in the local civic club. Indeed, almost every man whom I knew when I was a child belonged to the Granite Quarry, North Carolina, Civitan Club.<sup>8</sup> At one time or another, he held most of the offices in the small Methodist church that my great-grandfather had served as pastor. Whether he was with the bridge club, the kids in the neighborhood, the church youth group, the local restaurant servers and patrons (I think that he knew most of them in the Virginia small towns where he worked), or the staff in the stores that were his customers, he was a people person. When he died, he was on his way to his weekly playtime with the toddlers in the nursery of the much bigger church that the family attended after we moved to Roanoke, Virginia.

All of this went two ways—or, better stated, multiple ways. For example, when my sister married

<sup>8</sup>See <http://www.ourstate.com/granite-quarry-civitan/> for a recent magazine article about the club.

after my dad became disabled, my parents' Sunday School class hosted the reception. When Dad died, the informal restaurant that my parents frequented donated the catering for the funeral. As I am sure that Dad never would have expected, the sanctuary seating hundreds of people was packed. The owner of a motel where my dad had stayed when he worked in the area brought in his remodeling crew to renovate the family home, which had fallen into disrepair, so that it could be sold. (That family friend became a

and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded.<sup>9</sup>

Ms. Stanley's quote that apparently meant so much to my father not only describes successful *people*, it also presents the essence of successful institutes concerned with community life. Indeed, a successful institute is a way of life. It presents a venue that enables thoughtful, caring, and dedicated professionals and community volunteers to experience "success" a bit more easily. Such an

*A successful institute is a way of life—a venue that enables thoughtful, caring, and dedicated professionals and community volunteers to experience success a bit more easily*

loyal volunteer in the Ronald McDonald House that my mother subsequently managed. Indeed, especially after Dad's death nearly 30 years ago, my mother became an even more active community servant than he had been, but that is a story for another time.) Of course, there are many other examples from earlier years.

When Dad died, he had a tattered clipping of a *Dear Abby* column in his wallet. The column focused on a quote ("What Is Success?"), which is usually misattributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson but which was actually written by an early-20th-century magazine subscriber, Bessie Anderson Stanley, in response to an open call for 100-word essays:

To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest citizens and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played

entity brings scientific and humanistic insights, just as it capitalizes on the assets in living communities, to facilitate the appreciation and enhancement—even transformation—of the expression of human rights in everyday life. One needs little knowledge of academic culture to

<sup>9</sup>The actual language of Ms. Stanley's essay was modernized—secularized—somewhat in *Dear Abby* and in current commercial uses of the quote. Hence, e.g., Ms. Stanley actually lauded the originator of "an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul" rather than the creator of a "garden patch or a redeemed social condition." The poetic language in the original magazine text follows:

He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction.

imagine the gap between this mode of study and action and the norms present in conventional university departments and schools.

*The Continuing Struggle*

To illustrate this point further, I will close with a description of another personal experience. In January 2012, Robin and I were privileged to attend the 20th annual joint observance of Martin Luther King Day by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Morehouse and Spelman glee clubs. Reflecting Dr. King's own musical taste and arguably expressing the threads of his own distinctive and monumental contributions, the annual concert combines the messages and experiences of African American artistic and spiritual expression and the aesthetics and ethics in Western intellectual history.

Yo-Yo Ma was the soloist in the centerpiece of the King Day concert (Dvořak's Concerto in B minor for cello and orchestra). Besides owning many of Maestro Ma's albums, we have been fortunate to see and hear him perform on several occasions. In my judgment, he is without peer among contemporary musicians. Hearing him play is always memorable and inspirational, and the choirs and orchestra also gave performances worthy of the celebration.

After taking well-deserved bows at the end of the Dvořak concerto, the musicians assembled for an unannounced encore. I whispered to Robin that the forthcoming encore had to be *We Shall Overcome*. I was correct, but only partially so. Apparently spontaneously, Maestro Ma picked up his chair and his instrument and carried them to the back of the cello section, where he sat humbly in the last seat. He then began playing the elegiac, soulful *Sarabande* from Bach's Suite No. 5 in C-minor for unaccompanied cello. Words fail me in describing the



performance, which was stunning, even transcendent. By the end of Maestro Ma's solo, tears were streaming down my cheeks.

Then immediately upon the conclusion of the *Sarabande*, the Morehouse choir began to sing its director's inspiring and distinctive arrangement of *We Shall Overcome*. The Morehouse arrangement builds into an up-tempo crescendo in the verse proclaiming, "We are not afraid today." The two compositions blended into one extraordinary experience that symbolized the losses, the challenges, and the triumphs that were embodied in Dr. King's life and that have been amplified in the succeeding generation (I encourage readers to re-create this stirring event for themselves).<sup>10</sup>

So what is the significance of this anecdote? At an early point in this

social importance, were created to do what is difficult for universities to do but that they ought to do. Thus, institutes are created in struggle; they continue in struggle.

The power that energizes such struggles can be found not only in the once-in-a-lifetime expression of genius and caring by a heroic humanist like Yo-Yo Ma but also in the spiritual and human meaning of daily acts of greatness by exceptional commoners, as reflected in the evocative lyrics and tune of a simple but inspiring folk song like *We Shall Overcome*. What makes the Morehouse choir's arrangement so special is not just the historical context that those of us who grew up in the American South a half-century ago know all too well. The Morehouse arrangement is not memorable because it stimulates a kum-bah-yah good feeling. Rather, it challenges

*We must diligently discover, understand, apply, and spread the contributions of successful people—exceptional servants—as the foundations for truly transformed, hospitable, and decent communities*

article, I said that I would end with some thoughts about the difficulties that institutes on children, families, and communities face. Institutes were created to have the substantive breadth and the structural flexibility to do what universities *should* do, but thanks to their guild-ridden character, they usually cannot or will not. In short, institutes, especially those on matters of great

us to find the courage to overcome our fears.

Of course, the fears that the composer put before the singers were much more profound than those that we face today. We do not risk life and livelihood. But we still are called to muster the courage repeatedly to assume the risk of failure (maybe even frequent failures) in order to do the difficult, even the seemingly impossible, in transformational service to our communities.

Change toward greater sense of community *is* still possible, and it is worth the effort, even when the way is difficult, the access to tools is blocked (sometimes by academic institutions themselves), and the tide is flowing in the opposite direction.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

- Hashima, P. Y., & Melton, G. B. (2008). "I can conquer a mountain": Ordinary people who provide extraordinary service in Strong Communities. *Family and Community Health, 31*, 162–172.
- Melton, G. B. (1992). The law is a good thing (Psychology is, too): Human rights in psychological jurisprudence. *Law and Human Behavior, 16*, 381–398.
- Melton, G. B. (2010a). Angels (and neighbors) watching over us: Child safety and family support in an age of alienation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80*, 89–95.
- Melton, G. B. (2010b). Putting the "community" back into "mental health": The challenge of a great crisis in the health and well-being of children and families. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 37*, 173–176.
- Melton, G. B. (2010c). "To such as these, the kingdom of heaven belongs": Religious faith as foundation for children's rights. In J. Garbarino & G. Sigman (Eds.), *Children's right to a healthy environment* (pp. 3–30). New York, NY: Springer.
- Pausch, R., & Zaslow, J. (2008). *The last lecture*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Ross, L. (1977). The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 10, pp. 173–220). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Tomlin, J. (2011, November). Pride of place: Granite Quarry Civitans. *Our State*, pp. 128–133. (The November 2011 issue of *Our State*, a magazine about North Carolina, includes several articles about the importance of civic clubs in small towns in the American South.)

<sup>10</sup>Unfortunately, recordings of the encore at the MLK Day concert are not available. However, readers can approximate the experience by juxtaposing YouTube videos of prior performances of the selected music by Maestro Ma and the Morehouse Glee Club. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NaVpv9jsTo> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJ0>.

Amid the continuing societal decline in expressions of caring, we must diligently discover, understand, apply, and spread the contributions of successful people—exceptional servants—as the foundations for truly transformed, hospitable, and decent communities inclusive of those who are strangers, excluded, alienated, or in great need. Although some of us are fortunate enough rarely to experience such a sense of separation, it is a feeling that is all too common in the current era and

## the community

that probably encompasses most or all of us at times.

In that regard, I can find no better words to conclude this last lecture than the admonition that I offered in my first essay in *The Community* 3 years ago:

Remember that all of us—yes, *all of us*—experience not only joy but also anxiety and grief in our families. Such is the

human condition. Only some of us have the resources, however, not to feel so overwhelmed that children's safety and well-being are often compromised, maybe even most of the time. In either case, all of us deserve the support needed to strengthen and preserve the relationships most important to us.

Although a sense of community—a feeling of *ubuntu*, an experience of neighborly love

—may be increasingly rare in our society, such feelings of belonging are no less important than they have ever been. The human need for connection transcends the characteristics that divide us. It is fundamentally important, regardless of whether one is rich or poor, old or young, liberal or conservative, black, white, or brown.<sup>11</sup>

*People shouldn't have to ask.*

**Keywords:** last lecture; Randy Pausch; centers; institutes; guild issues; psychological-mindedness; subjective experience; psychological jurisprudence; legal realism; human rights; *Bowers v. Hardwick*; Strong Communities for Children; neighborhood effects; fundamental attribution errors; child protection; child mental health; collective experience; Morehouse Glee Club; Yo-Yo Ma; *We Shall Overcome*

---

<sup>11</sup>Gary B. Melton, *Angels (and Neighbors) Watching Over Us: Child Safety and Family Support in an Age of Alienation*, 80 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 89 (2010).