

Eulogy for Kim Geeslin

As a grateful former advisee of Kim's, I'll try to apply two of many principles I've learned from her here. One: "be specific. Give examples. Make what's abstract concrete." Two: "tell people why to care. Connect to a bigger picture." In this case, that Kim was a transcendent figure – a brilliant scholar, unparalleled mentor, and, most importantly, the best person most of us knew.

Fourteen years ago, I selected Indiana Univ. for my PhD in Hispanic Linguistics because of Kim. I searched widely, seeking good research but also good treatment of others. During a prospective student visit, we met for breakfast at Bloomington Bagel Company. Kim was so kind, down-to-earth, welcoming & of course, smart. I was hooked at first coffee & Everything Bagel.

My 2nd year, IU hosted the Hispanic Linguistics Symposium, co-chaired impeccably by Kim & Manuel Díaz-Campos. After the presentation, I then wrote up what I'd presented for publication in the conference proceedings. It was rejected. Written too hastily, needing bigger connections. Enter Kim. Enter one of more-emails-than-would-be-good-for-my-self-esteem to count. "Hi, Kim. Any chance you want to work on this together? See if we can publish it?" Kim's response, as seemingly always: "I'd be happy to help, Matt." A few months of hard work & brilliant guidance from Kim, the article was later accepted in a top journal, *SSLA*. A testament to Kim, not me. You'll recall that initial rejection.

In my final year of courses, a class closed w/o warning Day 1. I needed a solution, and fast. But full classes, time conflicts. Kim was already off-campus; this was pre-Zoom era. You might remember? She held emergency office hours from her car on speaker phone, somewhere b/w shuttling from work, the kids' schools, the next activity. She helped instantly solve the day's crisis, keeping me on track to graduate. Speaking of classes, those who had the luxury of taking a class w/ Kim were able to experience really high standards. And the way she held these standards w/o demoralizing us was a beautiful tight-rope walk. She would give you targeted feedback: here's where you are right now; here's where you need to be. And you would have a plan for how to get there. We would also read papers from former students, who had published in journals, often work that began in those very classes. Rather than daunting, she made these challenges feel exciting.

My 5th year was the academic job market. Kim prepared us so thoroughly for application materials, campus visits, job talks. Her tutelage often led to choices, & she was also peerless at decision time. "I can tell you what the best job is, but you have to be a person. I want you to go where you'll be happiest." That's Kim. No excess pressure, allowing her students & colleagues to be people, to have lives, to follow their own paths, across the US & abroad. In my job, when I needed to work w/ PhD students right away, like Kim at her start at IU, I only valued her all the more. Who knew grad students were so *needy*? For those w/ children, it might remind you of appreciating your parents *even more* once you had kids of your own.

Recruiting & publishing w/ students, teaching adeptly, securing jobs, Kim received two career distinguished teaching awards (Hostetter & Morley). Note "career" in the titles; these usually go to very senior faculty, not someone in her late 40s or early 50s. Crucially, Kim taught us not just about publishing or course content but how to care for the whole person because we felt so cared for. Perhaps Kim's ultimate gift was making you feel so special, sometimes just for the gift of sharing her space, her air. It certainly wasn't for an overabundance of time. Her to-do list could make anyone's head spin. And her relationships, her advising didn't end when the meeting ended, the semester, the degree program. It's why we feel so tied to her, & so many of her students are here from all over the country & online from all over the world.

Her research is cited nearly 2,600 times, huge in our field & for someone so young. She's published 3 books, 6 edited volumes, roughly 100 journal & handbook articles. Associate editor of *SSLA*, co-editor of Benjamins & Routledge series. I'm zipping through these professional highlights & that's a testament to Kim the *person*.

She's championed the underdog. Her advisees hail from across the globe & she's created economic opportunities for women, LGBT folks, individuals of color, and some heterosexual white men, too. A woman in academia, Kim faced 3 decades of obstacles *I'll never know* but that some of you *know well*.

And yet she cleared them, like Hayden over a hurdle or like Logan clearing a slapshot away from goal. And she always accepted us in our totality. Sometimes in ways our own families, partners, colleagues could not. Pretty radical really. But quietly. Kindly.

Kim was the biggest cheerleader most of us know. She exuded genuine happiness & pride for others' accomplishments. Never about her. This ethos permeated department culture. Encouraging e/o to submit papers & presentations. Being collaborative, not competitive. Kim would root for us in fun ways, too. "I hope you take a moment to savor the success," she'd often say. After graduating, it was a joy for alums to reconnect w/ her at conferences. Seasonal memories come to mind: "Kim, I'm grabbing a pumpkin ale. Want one?" "Oh, Matt, gourds & fruit are not for beer. I'll have an IPA." Agree to disagree. And then she'd add "But just *one* more, we need to run in the morning." And we'd indeed run. Around the Washington monuments. Through Mich. State's campus & hockey center. I'm rather neutral to running, but Kim loved it. And I loved running with Kim. "But not too long a run, Matt. I have to get Sean & the kids gear from the MSU store." "OK, Kim." As if *I'd* be the one to extend the run. Her energy seemed boundless. It also may have been Sean's espresso making. Kim had a great sense of humor, too. She could utter a "bless your heart" with the best of them when someone was out of touch with reality. With a lifetime career in academia, these opportunities were not infrequent.

Finally, Kim had, of course, a love for language & a shared appreciation for turns of phrase & vivid details in country & folk songwriting. One heavier example, Vermont's Cheryl Wheeler with "Since You've Been Gone": "Not to complain / we're just bereft / not deserted / Lord knows your rest was deserved / it's just your absence is present / in all that I do." I remember discussing this song after Kim's father Bill passed following Parkinson's. Unfortunately, this became another bond b/w Kim and me. When my dad was later diagnosed, Kim was as helpful as you'd imagine, especially when, after 5 falls, safest care became beyond our family home. Kim always made the impossible humane & somehow manageable. Mourning w/ some of you this past week, the "present in all I do" theme pervades. She made the professional personal. And the personal transcendent. She did this by treating us as full people, not just grad students, employees, neighbors. After I graduated, she remained a vital resource through tenure, & w/ house searches, mortgages, relationships. She somehow responded to every inquiry, usually that day, sometimes STAT. In these pandemic years, we'd exchange funny memes, animal videos, Words w/ Friends games, & then daily Wordle. As w/ running, I like Wordle just fine. But I love Wordle w/ Kim. Our last game was her last night. As I recently surveyed my home, she was everywhere. The new volume *she* suggested Megan and I propose, arriving the day she left us. The coffee beans she gifted, supporting a favorite non-profit, causing me to text Sean, "I can't even make morning coffee w/o thinking of her." Always so thoughtful. Even in preparing this eulogy, I looked down at the colorful note cards, evoking the brightness and vibrancy Kim always exuded. Insisting I stay w/ her family when IU hosted a corpus workshop. "Twist my arm, Kim." Sending a pumpkin cheesecake for the 1st Thanksgiving in my house (after all that housing advice). And then staying there with Sean, Logan, & Hayden on their way back from the Cape. *After all*; her letters, training, & reputation got me hired. It's the House that Geeslin built. And, yes, I apologize to her family for contributing to her gnome collection.

In conclusion, I hope this has followed some of Kim's principles. More so, I hope the way she has taught & modeled behaviors continues to shape us all. Our hearts ache profoundly. No *one* of us can possibly replace Kim Geeslin; *all of us* still aren't Kim. But as proud as she was of her very many achievements, she was proudest of the people that Logan & Hayden are, that Sean is, and the lessons she taught to those who learned from her. And so many of us have learned from her. If we can follow her example of kindness, patience, hard work, humanity, & selflessness, we just might be able to pick up the pieces, in time, and honor her one fraction of the way she has honored us. *Her whole life* has been teaching us what to do, how to somehow go on. Our hearts are with Kim's family, and the very many of us she made feel like family. We love you, Kim.