Personal Reflections on Carrie Menkel-Meadow

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University of California Los Angeles School of Law south entrance. Carrie Menkel-Meadow taught here for 20 years (photo by Coolcaesar, licensed under CC 3.0).

For many people, for a host of different reasons, 1L (the first year of law school) is alienating. A particularly dissonant piece for me was the absence of the word "client" in core courses. I kept wondering who the *people* were in the cases we read. What sorts of lives did they lead before these disputes we were eavesdropping into? What did they say (or not say) to their lawyers prior to their names being permanently etched in reporters and casebooks? And what impact did the actions (or inaction) of their lawyers, and the judges assigned to hear their cases, have on their quality of life after the court cases ended?

Carrie Menkel-Meadow brought this missing "client" piece into her classrooms. In her professional responsibility (PR) course, which I

took in my third year of law school, Carrie complemented theory with vivid, personal, and concrete examples about the real people she served throughout her professional career and those we would soon be serving.

Long before the term "professional identity formation" became part of legal education parlance, Carrie did far more than just teach rules; she guided us to carefully consider who we could *become*—as lawyers, leaders, *and* people. Transformative! And revolutionary (then) *in a doctrinal course* to focus both on legal rules and on lawyering skills and values!

Carrie cared deeply about the content. It is hard not to care about PR. How does the rule of law survive if lying to a tribunal is fine, if conflicts of interest are laughed off, if incompetence is the norm? I teach PR now and I suspect that the importance I place on these rules and policies stems in part from my first learning them with Carrie.

The text I have assigned in my course includes excerpts from Carrie's scholarship along with a beautiful photo of her. When we read the chapter where Carrie's work is cited, I proudly tell my students, "She was *my* professor," and I smile, recalling Carrie rushing to class from finishing an article, appearing in court, or conducting some hugely significant mediation. She was clearly very busy, but instantly, full of enthusiasm and, nearly dancing as she pivoted around the podium, Carrie became entirely present. In stark contrast to some professors who let students know, intentionally or inadvertently, that their "truly important work" was *not* in the classroom, Carrie authentically showed us that different parts of her professional life could not only coexist, but could each thrive and were each essential.

Carrie was thoughtful, creative, and funny in class; she brought vivid illustrations of how professional and ethical choices figured into daily life, using her own stories along with accounts from colleagues, current events, TV, and film, engaging students with group exercises, discussions, and role plays. We laughed a lot—something that stands out from the usual law school experience. Carrie's eyes would sparkle as she grilled us on who had spotted which egregious violations in the most recent episodes of the lawyer shows she assigned as homework. In addition to learning rules in memorable context, these assignments taught us how important it is for legal scholars to interact thoughtfully with both intellectual and popular content.

And Carrie's commitment to students extended beyond the classroom. In one of many conversations after class, Carrie opened a vitally important professional identity door for me. It was toward the end of the semester

when I found the courage to share a stinging 1L memory: being ridiculed by my torts professor and classmates. Why? I asked how a plaintiff who had been severely injured would function in her day-to-day world. I tried to see her as a woman I might have known or encountered and mentally put myself in her shoes. My gaffe was to interject client-centred questions into a lesson that was planned to focus exclusively on various methods of calculating damages. My inquiry challenged (appropriately, I *now* know) the limitations of traditional litigation, and money damages. But my question was seen at the time as irrelevant, non-lawyerly, and "soft". The plaintiff in question wasn't the point; the sole issue was the relative merit of varying economic principles. I took us off course.

I shared the incident, about which I still felt shame (though undoubtedly, I also *now* appreciate, it was not something anyone else remembered). Carrie's response instantly and forever changed my professional self-image, and my future. First, she smiled—that genuine smile, the one that radiates pride when students probed deeply or questioned expansively. And what a wonderful feeling it was to receive genuine warmth in such a vulnerable setting! Next, Carrie declared in no uncertain terms that I *had* been "*thinking like a lawyer*", one with an intuitive understanding of problem-solving as context-based. She noted that I was thoughtfully questioning whether every case was meant for the adversary system, and, without yet possessing adequate terminology, examining the sufficiency (or lack thereof) of monetary damages and calling for a discussion of equitable relief. Carrie added, icing the already sweet cakes of vindication and validation, that *had she been teaching* that 1L class, she would have welcomed my comments, indeed lauded them as highlighting the need for a larger framework of dispute resolution, beyond litigation.

I share this account to underscore the depth, breadth, and power of Carrie's teaching and support of students generally, and I know that serving as classroom professor is just one of her many spheres of influence. Through her scholarship, Carrie has created an entire discipline—one that has and will continue to better our world. And, while many law professors focus on placing their works in only the most prestigious and elite law journals, Carrie publishes for every audience, at the highest academic levels and in an accessible manner for students and non-lawyers, consistently using her powerful words and thoughts to make the world a better place for us all. As a mediator, Carrie has resolved otherwise intractable disputes—at home and abroad. And as a colleague, friend, and family member, Carrie has impacted the legal profession, the academy, and everyone whose life she has been a part of.

For me, it was Carrie's holistic and distinctly human vision of law school as so much more than Langdell's "scientific" exploration of *appellate litigation* that changed everything. And apologies to *Wicked*, but, because I was lucky enough to be a student of Carrie's, I have been changed for the better, and, dare I say, profoundly changed for good.

So, on behalf of all the students you have ever taught and all the students I would never have taught but for you: **Thank you, Carrie!**

About the author

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