

Julie's Reflections on Larry Smith

I think it was 2005 or 2006 – the first time I met Larry Smith. It was at a conference, and Nancy Spoolstra asked me to join them for breakfast. Having breakfast with Larry became my most frequent ways to see him – although it usually only happened once a year, when I traveled to DC and met him at one of his favorite breakfast places around Silver Spring.

What struck me about Larry at this first meeting was the importance he placed on helping, training and supporting the parents – something we at the Attachment & Trauma Network (ATN) have always thought was paramount. When I met Larry over a decade ago, he was already a “fixture” within ATN – having advised and supported Nancy since meeting her in 2003. So when a formal board was elected in 2009, it made perfect sense that Larry would be on it...and stay on it – a place he has served for the past 7 years.

This June I was so fortunate to spend more than just a breakfast with Larry – as he, along with Lorraine Schneider and I, drove from Maryland to New Jersey for ATN's first Trauma-Sensitive Schools training- several hours in a car! We talked shop about the trainings and workshops he was presenting, the importance of experienced therapeutic parents being involved in the training of other parents, and the ever-present topic of how to continue to finance the mission of ATN. But it wasn't all shop talk. We



teased Larry, as we always do, about his antics at board retreats – some of which had become ATN Board legends (blown way out of proportion over time – and he endured the relentless re-telling and embellishing of these legends through the years, at his expense.) Larry was that way – quick-witted, loving a good joke, and big-hearted. He regaled us with balancing a salt shaker on its edge at our lunch stop. We spent much of the car ride laughing. But the two clearest memories from the last time I saw Larry were:

- Sitting at our NJ board member's house before dinner with the group of ATNers and educators who had gathered. As we introduced ourselves and exchanged stories, one of the educators exclaimed, “You're the Lawrence B. Smith of the Oil and Water article!!??” She had connected our Larry to his formal name Lawrence. When Larry confirmed this she went on to tell him how valuable his article had been to her for years as a teacher and then an administrator. He smiled that soft, pensive, unassuming smile, and I said, “See, you're more famous than you know.” “Apparently,” he replied. This was a definite truth. The articles and information on the AttachmentDisorderMaryland.com have reached more people than Larry had any idea about. In those writing his wisdom, his life work, and passion for children of trauma, attachment disorder and FASD have shone through. I'm sure he never fully grasped how far his voice for traumatized children had traveled.
- Larry dropped me at the Silver Spring Metro after our drive back to Maryland. As we pulled up to the curb, he turned to me with that same smile and said “This is SO exciting! This training of educators is really big...really important. It's going to change the lives of so many children. I'm

excited to see where we're going!" Where "WE'RE GOING" – that was Larry – always part of the team, sharing the passion and pushing forward the mission for children and families.

On Tues, August 9, Larry's voice was one of many on our monthly Board call. He told me he would let me know by Friday if he was able to re-arrange his schedule to join Lorraine and I to receive ATN's Angel in Adoption award at the Capitol in September. The whole Board was giddy with the news of our recognition, and I was looking forward to sharing this event with our two longest-serving Board members. As was usual, he hopped off the call early- right before 1 pm, because he had a client coming in – he always had a client coming in – and the children and their families always came first. We had no idea it was the last time we'd talk to Larry.

On Friday, I learned he would not be joining us in September – not from Larry as I had expected – but from the mom of one of his clients. I was driving through Illinois on my way to Chicago for vacation on a beautiful day that suddenly turned dark. I could hear the grief and shock in every word of this mom's email and feel both emotions well up in me.

There's a large hole in the attachment & trauma community today. He left behind colleagues and those he taught and mentored who highly respected him. He left behind countless clients who had been helped on their healing journeys.

And he left behind his passion for spreading awareness about and healing of childhood trauma and attachment disorders.

We will pick up the mantle, Larry, and continue to move the mission forward. But we won't be able to fill your shoes or replace your voice. You are, and will remain, deeply missed.