Hard Work, Humility, and A Sense of Caring: Ev as I Remember Him

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It is my great honor to be here with you to celebrate the life and work of Dr. Everett M. Rogers, one of my treasured mentors at the University of New Mexico. I would like to thank Dr. Glenda R. Balas for all the hard work to organize this panel. I am sure each and every one of you has special memories about Dr. Rogers, and some of you probably know him better and longer than I do. I truly appreciate you allow me to share some of my personal memories about Dr. Rogers this afternoon.

Dr. Rogers preferred to be called Ev, but as a Japanese and also out of respect, I could never call him Ev. This is the first time that I have called him Ev to give him a surprise, and I hope he is listening to me from Heaven. I can still hear him say, “Hi! Hi! Yoshi.” He once joked about his own way of greeting and said, “It almost sounded Japanese, right?”

No one would disagree that Ev was well loved because he was a hard worker with great humility and a deep sense of caring. Unlike some famous professors, he was not arrogant. He was not egocentric. He did not take advantage of others. I guess that Ev did not forget his early life in a farming community in Iowa, did not waste anything, and kept his sense of gratitude and obligation. I never felt that he was talking down to me. He was always humble and willing to learn from anyone. He always tried to help people who were in need of help, return something to the community, and make the world a better place.

One day, when I walked into the mailroom, Ev, who had made a number of copies of his conference paper, was signing each of them and putting it into an envelope in order to send it to a person who had requested for it. I was impressed with his diligence, perseverance, and commitment. Sooner or later, he would probably publish the paper. With his fame and stature, he could have ignored those people without offending them because they knew he was busy. Ev had never been lazy. This was probably a secret of his popularity.
Another day, when Ev and I were walking to the UNM bookstore, I was saying that I made enemies, as well as friends, by proposing my Asiacentric idea. He responded, “If you don’t have enemies, you aren’t doing serious things. Unfortunately, that’s the nature of academia.” I felt heartened. Ev knew how to give subtle yet sound advice often by telling stories. He was such a great storyteller that many students sometimes lost track of time in listening to his stories. Ev was a positivist, but he believed in the power of storytelling.

Ev was especially kind to international students, many of whom were the weakest members of U.S. graduate programs. They liked him not only because he spoke slowly, but also because his genuine sense of caring touched them. They were often alone on a foreign and unfamiliar land. Ev truly did care for students but not out of his self-interest. He made doctoral candidates who were on job search less stressed by saying to them, “It is easy to sell a good product,” whenever he was asked to write letters of recommendation.

In retrospect, I realize how much Ev did for others. He read all the manuscripts that I wrote for publication. Yes, I wondered why he wrote “Cordially, Ev” after every comment. Yes, I wondered why his handwriting was so tiny. Yes, I wondered why he liked pens with purple ink. But, for some reason, those corrections make me feel his incredible generosity. When I visited Albuquerque to turn in my dissertation, I saw him in his office. We talked briefly. When I was about to leave, Ev said, “Yoshi, I will see you at conferences.” He gently smiled at me. That was my last contact with him.

Ev wrote in his book, *A History of Communication Study: A Biographical Approach* (Free Press, 1997) that “these communication pioneers live on in their influential writings and in our thinking. They never died” (p. xv). As he noted, “It is to these academic ancestors that we are all indebted. It is to their memory that we carry forward the history that they left us” (p. viii). Likewise, Ev is still alive. He continues to live on in his writings and in our thinking. Thank you so much for everything, Ev. You certainly left us the history that we will carry forward with the spirit of humanity in diversity.