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by Noelle Chesley, Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Phyllis Moen: A Tribute

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I moved to central New York—Ithaca, to be exact—in 1996. I needed a job, and Phyllis Moen was hiring for a new research project. I managed to secure an interview, and, to prepare, I checked out a copy of her then-recent book *Women's Two Roles* from the library.

I vividly remember being blown away as I sat in my living room reading this book the night before our meeting. The truth was, I had been struggling in my professional life and had just left a consulting career to follow my partner to Cornell. My hope then was to find something more interesting to do with my life. I had no idea that night that I was about to meet the person who would completely reshape the course of my career.

I got the job, and my relationship with Phyllis began. I very quickly realized that I had “chanced” into the opportunity of a lifetime. Phyllis had just received a multimillion dollar grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to create the first Sloan-sponsored center devoted to generating research on working families, training the next generation of work-family scholars, and providing outreach on work-family topics to the community.

I was the Center's first employee and in this role (and later as her graduate student) had the opportunity to work closely with her as she created, from scratch, what would come to be an important institution in the work family field. This was one of the formative experiences of my career, but also tells a story about the type of scholar and mentor that Phyllis is.

As a young 20-something professional, I can remember being awed by Phyllis' inclusiveness. I had come from a rigidly hierarchical firm in which information disclosure and socializing were linked to one's job description. Outside the walls of the *Cornell Careers Institute*, that model was generally intact, but inside it, Phyllis made an effort to give everyone opportunities for professional development. I can clearly remember that early into my tenure as her employee, I was invited to attend a lunch Phyllis was hosting



Phyllis Moen

for Martha Farnsworth Ritchie, who at that time was the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau. I was extremely excited to meet Dr Ritchie (I have always harbored a secret desire to work at the Census!), but was floored that I would be included in an invitation to a small lunch with faculty. Phyllis included me in internal meetings with our dean, and in meetings with our Center faculty. She offered up any number of opportunities for me to grow professionally, including hands-on participation in the design and implementation of the Center's research projects. I remember this as a particularly exciting time in my professional life that was heavily influenced by my relationship with Phyllis and her ability and confidence to let me take on some of the Center's research challenges. I know from talking with other former students, post-docs, and employees that I am just one among many who has benefited in these ways from knowing and working with Phyllis.

Phyllis is also extremely generous with both time and money. Since I have known her, she has always had any number of people and projects competing for her attention, but even now, she reads my work and offers advice. Phyllis's mentorship of others was apparent to me then, too. She was very clear that she wanted a good portion of the Sloan grant money used to provide professional opportunities and training to the Center's graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and even junior faculty. Travel stipends and summer funding programs supported student-student and faculty-student collaborations, many of which have produced important research findings. As her graduate student, I benefited greatly from opportunities for regular travel to conferences, which instilled early on the expectation that producing and presenting one's work in the academic community (and beyond) is a regular part of a scholarly career.

Many people know Phyllis through her work

and the substantial contributions she has made to our understanding of the social aspects of aging, the work family interface, life course scholarship, and adult development.

Her research agenda considers the links between existing and often outdated institutions (especially work, family, gender, and retirement), social transformations (economic, demographic, social and technological, as well as policy shifts), and the life biographies, health, and well-being of individuals and families. Her ecology of the life course framework promotes understanding of the organizational arrangements and life-course pathways perpetuating gender and age disparities. Investigating patterns of continuity and change in roles and relationships has been one of the lynchpins of her research as has her focus on the importance of “linked lives” in shaping the lives of men and women. Indeed, she has spear-headed a number of important longitudinal studies, including the *Women’s Roles and Well-Being Study*, the *Cornell Retirement and Well-Being Study*, and the *Ecology of Careers Panel Study*.

Phyllis Moen’s scholarship demonstrates how gender and age, as master statuses, are embedded in social structures and conventional thinking, shaping the life choices and life chances of individuals as they enter, persist in, exit, and sometimes reenter and re-exit roles and relationships over time. She is a prolific scholar who has published her work in myriad prominent academic journals.

She has also edited or written eight books including *Examining Lives in Context: Perspectives on the Ecology of Human Development* (1995), *A Nation Divided* (1999), *Social Integration in the Second Half of Life* (2001), *It’s About Time: Couples and Careers* (2003), and *The Career Mystique: Cracks in the American Dream* (2005).

There is no question that Phyllis Moen is an important scholar. However, I hope through this article that more people have an understanding of her great achievements as a mentor and a person, as well. While she was doing top-notch scholarship, building institutions, teaching, and mentoring the next generation of scholars (you know, her day job), she was also, at different points in her life, raising two daughters as a single parent, caring for her brother and for her aging mother, and being

someone’s wife. She modeled how to have an academic career *and* a life for numerous ambitious women (and a few men) and I see this as one of her key achievements. While stories abound in the academy of advisors recoiling in horror to hear that their (female) students either want to have children or are going to have a child, Phyllis has had any number of students and post-docs with children. When I went to her as a graduate student apprehensive about how to have a child and stay on track, she was encouraging and supportive. We came up with a plan (my husband was also involved!) for when to get pregnant and how to make it work with my career ambitions. I look back on that experience grateful for her sound advice.

Phyllis has earned my tremendous respect not just because her scholarship inspires and humbles me (it does), but also because of the person she is and her accomplishments outside of the academy. She has a quick and vast intellect that is coupled with a generous and thoughtful heart. In my experience, this can be a rare combination, whether in the academy or outside of it. That I have had the opportunity to benefit intellectually and personally from our relationship is something for which I am exceedingly grateful.