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**Retirement reflections, University Club, Chicago, September 12, 2014**

I've always been more excited about beginnings than endings. I love the hazy light of dawn welcoming a new day but hardly take notice when dusk settles in. I love the creative rush that comes in envisioning a new idea, the hoopla surrounding the launch of a new initiative, the hopeful expectations that accompany a new working relationship. For me, beginnings are filled with hope and optimism—a fresh opportunity to 'get it right' or at least do it better than the last time.

If anything I have tended to discount endings. When I told my colleagues of my plan to retire from NLU, I shared that I hoped to follow the example of Carley Simon who said she wanted to walk down the ladder gracefully, one step at a time—to get smaller and smaller in a significant way. My plan was to slip out the back door on my last day, no fanfare, no big deal. In fact, the thought of a ceremonial goodbye made me feel awkward and uncomfortable.

Well, I had a major shift in thinking a couple of months ago when I picked up Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's latest book *Exit: The Endings that Set Us Free*. Safiyah, our Director of Training at the McCormick Center had recommended the book. The title sounded intriguing given my impending exit from NLU.

In her usual scholarly, but accessible way, Lawrence-Lightfoot explores the many exits that "punctuate our days and give shape to our lives—the ways in which we say goodbye to one another, to the families we've been part of, to the children we've nurtured, to the organizations we've worked for, to the communities where we've belonged, to the identities that have defined us, and to the roles that have given us purpose and status." Many exits, Lawrence-Lightfoot says, are ordinary and go unnoticed while others are forever memorable and rock our worlds.

I found this notion of exit intriguing and worthy of deeper reflection so instead of hastily packing up my office files I decided to carefully and methodically make an event out of it. This was no small task; as you see, if I had not gone into teaching I might have become an archivist for the Smithsonian. Sifting through 30 years of carefully organized (and, might I add, neatly labeled) syllabi, grant proposals, project budgets, research data, and miscellaneous correspondence took me a full eight weeks.

But what a special two months that was. Time to savor the rich memories associated with each class roster, each funded and rejected grant proposal, each evaluation report documenting outcomes. During the process I discovered three important things. First, my 30 years are a perfect case study of the powerful role of technology in shaping one's career. When I accepted the faculty position at NLU I was putting the finishing touches on

my dissertation, a dissertation that was only 150 pages in length but took six of these floppy disks to hold all the information—cutting edge technology at the time.

My first published journal articles were also cataloged in the ERIC system so I unearthed scores of lovely microfiche in my files, as well. Every faculty member in this room has many more examples of how technology has not only changed the pace of what we do, but literally how we think about our work, how we interact with our students and colleagues, how we research and organize new information, and how we code, analyze, retrieve, and archive data.

My second important take-away from my nostalgic archeological dig is that my memory isn't nearly as good as I thought it was. I experienced my time at NLU as a series of loosely connected events, but it was only by looking back at the totality of those years that the underlying themes and the subtle changes that occurred in my perspective about my work, my colleagues, and the institution emerged.

One of my favorite authors, Julian Barnes, says that memory equals events plus time. Time doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent. He says that when we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; but when we are old, we invent different pasts for others. When we tell our own story we often adjust and embellish to suit our liking. Our only hope is that we will outlive anyone who would counter our version of the facts. My time spent looking through the raw data of my 30 years helped me better understand my filtered version of events and correct some serious memory lapses.

Finally, the experience of rummaging through the agendas of my life at NLU underscored the obvious—that no career is a solo act. It's all about relationships. Every person in this room has influenced in some small or some significant way my thinking and decision making, my level of job satisfaction and professional fulfillment, and my ability live out my passion, to feel like my efforts matter. I may be the honoree today, but this gathering is really about you. I am deeply appreciative of your friendship and collegial support.

And a special call-out to my dear husband Darrell who was the one who convinced me to leave my cushy faculty position at Mills College in California and move to the Midwest in 1983 in the middle of the winter on one of the coldest days in Chicago's recorded history. He has been the most amazing mentor.

Folks have asked me what I will miss the most in my retirement. No hesitation in how to answer that one. It is clearly the camaraderie, laughter, and playful spirit of my colleagues at the McCormick Center. I am really excited about the future of the center. Sue has assembled an awesome team whose dedication and commitment to the field is unsurpassed. They bring new perspectives, new skills, and new sense of energy and vitality. The center is in good hands.

So let me wrap this up. Reading Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot's book really helped me reframe my exit from NLU, giving it the attention and significance it was due. I'm really glad I spent my summer rummaging through those dusty, faded files. And I'm equally glad Nivine and Sue provided me with the opportunity to thank you in person for being part of my NLU story.

So what's next? Lawrence-Lightfoot says that on the other side of the exit, people often struggle with establishing themselves in their new role while they continue to disentangle themselves from the social expectations of their previous role. The task is to create an ex-role where one's previous identity (what she labels as our "hangover identity") is incorporated into a future identity. Well, I feel confident I will be able to replot myself and create a meaningful post NLU chapter in my life. One retiree describes it as moving from "Who's Who" to "Who's she?" But who cares?

I have at least one, maybe two more books I am itching to write. But I also know I am eager to diversify my skill and interest portfolio. For certain I have some serious catching up to do on the pop culture front. I am happy to report I've got a good jumpstart on that goal. Darrell and I have done some serious binge viewing over the past couple of weeks, taking in all five seasons of Breaking Bad. In case you're interested in the stats: that's 62 episodes in 16 days, each 47 minutes long. I should be embarrassed, but actually I'm feeling quite proud about that feat. Not once in those mind-numbing TV viewing days did I chastise myself thinking I could have written a journal article in the time I was frittering away. See, there is hope for me in retirement.

Thank you for being a part of this wonderful celebration. I am so blessed.