

unwinding from a long day at APSA, alongside a handful of other old grad school friends. We indulged in carefree chatter and swapped stories over drinks and dumplings. Most of us had meant to attend the QMMR reception, but we came here instead, perhaps instinctively opting for a more intimate and exclusive gathering because we knew it would be the last one like this. That night we

talked about tenure, travel, cancer, children, spouses, and friends. That night we joked and laughed and kept it light but somehow also dug deep into the serious stuff. That night we lived out a shared vision of focusing on what matters most: our loved ones, camaraderie, human connection, and terrible jokes. That night we shared some dumplings...and a dream.

No Causality without Correlation: On Learning from Kendra Koivu

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On the cover of *The Sagas of Icelanders*, there is a quote by the great Seamus Heaney. He writes that the almost-800-page tome is “a testimony to the human spirit’s ability not only to endure what fate may send it but to be renewed by the experience.” When I picked it up for her in September of 2019, I couldn’t help but be struck by how much that sounded just like Kendra Koivu.

I first met Kendra when I came to visit the University of New Mexico, before I knew whether I would attend, but after I knew I had been accepted to the PhD program. She was, without a doubt, one of the brightest lights on the faculty, even as its newest member. I remember being excited by the prospect of working with her and was thrilled when she sent me an email saying she wanted to work with me, too.

The semester she was diagnosed, I was her TA for Comparative Politics. She sent me an email saying that she wasn’t sure what things would look like yet or what kind of treatment options she might have. She wrote: “We’ll take things as they come.” And we did, at least in terms of class. In those early days, I didn’t see anything “behind the scenes,” but I witnessed how she handled the diagnosis with her class and her students—she met it head-on, like a warrior. She announced to the room of 80 or so undergraduates, in a voice that quavered with emotion but was the epitome of strength and grace, that she didn’t know what was going to happen. At first, the room was silent. Then, she cracked a joke about how she might end up bald, so she thought she might dye her hair purple or green first. Everyone laughed—maybe a

little too quickly—relieved that she had provided them an outlet.

After the intensity of that semester, things settled into a pattern. Sometimes she’d need to get a class covered or cancel a meeting. Still, the cancer felt more like something we could incorporate, something that could be handled, rather than a looming threat.

During that time, she heartily supported my wanting to take one of my comprehensive exams in methods, part of which included attending the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR). She came out for an author’s workshop, and we met up for dinner. We waited forever to get into a restaurant she wanted to try. We had taken a shuttle from the hotel to get there, but by the time we had eaten we had missed the window to take it back. We traversed the different neighborhoods on foot, discussing the *why* of inequality as the scenery changed. Kendra loved the *why* and would approach it as an exploration of necessary and sufficient conditions, no matter the topic. “Are these really causal mechanisms,” she would ask, “or are they more like contributing factors?” Over the years, I had a number of similar conversations with her; in the classroom, in a cab, in a fancy wine bar. In those moments, it seemed as though she could conquer anything.

On another summer day, a few years after our rendezvous in Syracuse, Kendra sent me an email inviting me to lunch. At the time, it felt out of the blue. My dissertation had fallen apart after one of my field sites collapsed, and I couldn’t figure out an ethical way to salvage it. I had a one-and-a-half-year-old at home who

wouldn't sleep through the night and not enough money to afford full-time daycare. Since becoming a mother, I'd encountered a range of experiences on campus that completely floored me—sometimes in a positive way, but more often in a demoralizing, I-can't-believe-that-just-happened kind of way. In a word, I was struggling. I'm not sure I even realized how much I was struggling—and then, the email notification came across my screen. It was simple: “How are you? Let's do lunch!” I responded, we set up a time.

The first few minutes were filled with small talk, but she quickly launched into what must have been a prepared speech, or at least, a series of things that had been firmly in her mind. She knew what was going on with me, she'd been paying attention. At first, I protested— not wanting to admit to feeling weak or powerless. But she didn't let up. She laid it out for me: specific observations about balancing motherhood with graduate school, the concepts I'd been wrangling in my new dissertation prospectus, the blows that had shaken my self-confidence. It was brutal, and honest, and I knew I couldn't deny the truth behind her words. And then, she shared with me parts of her own story, things she had experienced, lessons she'd learned. She let me know I wasn't alone.

After that meeting, and through an intentional series of very small steps, she helped me to rebuild—my dissertation, yes, but really only as a byproduct of learning how to trust myself again. In a time when I felt too defeated to put any kind of meaningful words on paper, she gave me the courage to write a bad first draft. She printed out a calendar and we mapped out a plan—times to meet, times to turn in work. When we met, she would help me draw out my ideas, pushing me to connect with them on a deeper level. Somewhere, I have a folder filled with her writing—notes on papers of all sizes, full of diagrams and arrows and big-picture questions. A love

language of enthusiasm and excitement and scribbles.

The last semester she was at UNM, I was teaching my own class, and had a student who was giving me a really hard time. When I'd planned the class originally, she'd been excited to do a guest lecture on Ottoman rule in Turkey. Once the semester was underway, however, her strength had begun to falter, and I instead incorporated some of the materials she gave me into my own planned lecture. But after she witnessed some of my difficulties with the student directly, she changed her mind. I could see how drained she was— but she insisted it was more important that she come to class. It wasn't sufficient, she said, to believe in my ability to teach the class; it was necessary to *show* the students that she respected me and to confer her approval of me publicly. She not only validated the difficulty I was having, she wanted me to know it wasn't my fault. She went out of her way to tell me that she knew how much I cared about teaching and my students, and then she put herself on the line for me. It was one hell of a lecture.

The last time I saw her, I was with my colleague, Fiorella Vera-Adrianzen. Kendra was at home in hospice care. At first, the heavy air was filled with awkward musings about food and politics. She asked about our families, our work, a conference presentation I was scheduled to give at Notre Dame. She reiterated positive comments about the paper— she called it the “shadow institutions” paper, although it was never as cool as that name implied. She apologized that she hadn't given me feedback on the most recent draft. Even in that space, in that time, she was giving us advice, encouragement, support. We wanted to tell her how much she meant to us, how amazing we thought she was. But it was too hard; we couldn't do it. Instead, we told her we'd do our best to make her proud, to share what she'd taught us. Her response was certainty—of course we would. She believed in us. There was no doubt.

On the Loss of a Dear Friend

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Kendra was one of my best friends. She was a brilliant scholar and a wonderful collaborator, but she was so much more than that. She was warm and generous, with an open-hearted acceptance of people that always amazed me. I miss her terribly.

When I showed up at Northwestern, I was the only woman in my cohort. My male colleagues were great, but I was slightly adrift with no female counterparts. A year ahead of me, Kendra quickly took me under her wing, and we became fast friends. During my second and third years, we shared an office in Scott Hall. Though