How I Met Bob Fischer

BONNIE YOUNGS

Carnegie Mellon University

Whoa! Bob Fischer?!? I’m going to work with Bob Fischer?!?

I remember the workshop like it was yesterday, but in fact, it was 1996. I partially remember the year because I was hugely pregnant at the time and it was summer. The workshop was with Libra and gasp!, laser discs. (Who knew they’d go by the wayside?). Anyway, Bob and Mike Farris came to Carnegie Mellon to give the workshop and with other Modern Language colleagues (shout out to Chris, Anne, and Etsuko!), we learned how to use Libra to design and create listening comprehension exercises. We had a terrific week and I learned that ‘BOB FISCHER!’ was a pretty nice guy. And from that point on professionally, even though I was always hesitant to ask him directly or suggest his name to my department head, Bob always came through for me, a junior colleague, when I needed reference letters for professional organizations or for promotion.

After that, I found myself able to approach him during CALICO conferences and we ran into each other at ACTFL, NECTFL, and even a JNCL-NCLIS meeting in Washington, DC. He was always open, encouraging, and ready to talk and shoot the breeze. By this, I mean that when my junior colleagues and I would ask him what the next best thing to research was, he had an answer. And actually, the answer is what we’re exploring in this volume: how students use computers to learn. It’s kind of funny (and sad) that we’re still looking at this question so many years later (I am no longer a junior colleague…).

It was during the fate-filled 1997 CALICO conference at West Point that I became more aware of Bob, not because I was privy to what went on behind closed doors, but because that was when Bob became CALICO; certainly as Executive Director and journal editor, but also as a nice guy who stepped in when it was needed to support an organization that he loved. It wasn’t until many years later that I put together some pieces of the West Point puzzle, and even more years to realize how much work Bob did for CALICO in the ensuing years.

For me, the first ‘real’ meeting with Bob was at the CALICO at Michigan State University. I must have looked like a puppy, following him around, trying to talk to him. When I was nominated and then joined the Executive Board, it was even more interesting to hear the history of CALICO, learn about some past events and evolutions, and understand where Bob wanted the organization to go in the future. When my time on the board ended and Willard Daetsch stepped down as secretary, it was a no-brainer for me to offer my services as secretary. I wanted to stay close to the organization and what better way than to be required to go to the
conference every year?

I remember, I forget which CALICO, I attended one of Bob’s workshops on research. It was at that point that I discovered that there was actually a real brain behind the Executive Director. I knew that Bob was doing many jobs, in addition to editing the journal, but I had never really seen the research side of him. I had always associated him with the development side of CALICO; I hadn’t really thought of him as a research guy. Of course, I had read his papers, read the journal, and so on, but at that moment, I started to really see him as a researcher-scholar.

I am very proud of Bob for what he has done for CALICO, and not in the martyr-like vision that I used to have of him. Bob did what he needed to for CALICO, an organization that he thoroughly enjoyed and enjoys, not because he wanted to be the Great & Mighty Executive Director of Oz, er, CALICO, but because he wanted to give back to the organization and to the people whom he got to know, personally and professionally. With Esther, they moved the CALICO ship along a rocky shore and it is anchored in stable waters now, continuing its cruise to the future (a pitiful metaphor, I know, but à propos nonetheless). Bob’s stepping down was sad for many reasons, but the support that he has given to the Board and to the new organizational model is terrific. He will always be there for CALICO and now that I’m one of the senior colleagues around, it will be my pleasure to mentor the juniors as they come up, as Bob did for me.

Thanks Bob!!