**Staying After School**

*In typical OLLI fashion, a conversation between a teacher and student becomes an opportunity for two women to connect as peers.*

**L KENDALL:** In typical OLLI fashion, a conversation between a teacher and a student becomes an opportunity for two women to connect as peers. To the point of sharing some very personal details about their personal lives.

**N SMABY:** I was this little Minnesota woman, very naïve, and ended up jumping into a world that I was clueless about.

(DING SOUND)

**A POLAND:** When my mom brought me home from the orphanage, I was basically committing suicide. I was refusing food.

(DING SOUND)

**L KENDALL:** Stay with us, as an OLLI instructor and student teach and learn some life lessons from each other.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**L KENDALL:** Welcome *to In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. OLLI is an acronym for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute located at the Cal State San Bernardino campus, here in Palm Desert, California.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC ENDS)

**L KENDALL:** We are about to eavesdrop on a conversation between two luminous voices of OLLI. Dr. Arlette Poland holds an alphabet of academic degrees. Ph.D., J.D., M.A., two of those, as well as a B.S. She has also led a number of lives which she calls her mini-me’s. Activist, minister, lawyer, ventriloquist, even political operative. Currently, Dr. Arlette is a painter, podcaster, professor at CoD that is College of the Desert, and again she especially treasures an OLLI instructor who enjoys a unique relationship with her students.

**A POLAND:** The students are peers and many of them actually have had more life experience than you.

**L KENDALL:** One of the students is Nanci Smaby. She brings a wealth of life experiences to the classroom. As both a life coach and a passionate lifetime learner. Nanci took a break in her mid-twenties to finish her undergraduate degree and later earned a Master's degree in Psychology. Serving on the OLLI curriculum committee, while enrolling in a vast spectrum of courses every semester. Nanci has become a keen observer of the unique teacher-student relationships at OLLI, including Dr. Arlette’s classes.

**N SMABY:** As a student, I do feel like we are contemporary and that there isn’t a higher or lower or any kind of that stuff that is going on. It is a very receptive connecting relationship.

**A POLAND:** This is part of why I love teaching with OLLIbecause when I start teaching something and if I am teaching them something new, they are also teaching back when they start to ask questions because they are coming from their relationship to time, and all of the things they have done. It is kind of fun to not always be the oldest person in the room.

(LAUGHTER)

**N SMABY:** Oh yeah. When I went to college you know, there was so much more clarity about the difference of stature of the student and teacher that I just loved their availability of getting to know our teachers. I have taken so many wonderful classes from you and I have enjoyed them all but I am dying to ask you one question. Where do you get the energy to do all the things that you are doing?

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** I think, similar question to what my mom used to ask me something like that as well. “When are you ever going to stop?” or she would say “You’re never going to stop, are you?”

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** And I think it’s just a passion to express whatever the next me is. And the passion I have with OLLI in particular is about how I get to create the classes and then get to present them to a bunch of interested and educated people who really listen and want to learn or share their knowledge as well. It’s just phenomenal… just being a member and teacher with OLLI for so many years. 15 years now, it has just really added to my life and part of being involved with OLLI has kept me in teaching maybe even longer than I might have otherwise wanted to stay.

**L KENDALL:** The conversation now becomes more personal. Not so much teacher and student, but two women chatting, let's say over afternoon tea about life, relationships, even self-identity.

**A POLAND:** Ok but Nanci, I have seen you in a bunch of classes and you are just so beautiful and full of all this wonderful knowledge and I get the sense that you’ve traveled and had a very interesting life up until the time I see you in class.

**N SMABY:** I was this little Minnesota woman, very naive, and ended up dropping into a world that I was clueless about. Gary and I were dating a million years ago and decided to take a global semester through St. Olaf College and this is in 1970. So, we ended up getting married and we went and spent the summer in Europe. We did summer school at the university of Oslo and met the rest of the 33 members, which concluded a husband who was a professor, his wife, and his son had enrolled to continue our nine-month adventure around the world. We started in the mid-east and we were actually there when they bombed the 747 in Cairo. In 1970, it was a scary time in so many places, and half of the time I was truly scared to death. I mean physically because I was afraid that we were going to get bombed or riots or we were in India and met Ira Gandhi and spent the afternoon with her. We really had the most phenomenal experiences. Gary had done a lot of traveling, he was way more sophisticated in that world. So, for me, it opened my eyes. It opened my eyes to the curiosity about the world, adventure, and travel that I never ever would have had if I didn’t do that.

**A POLAND:** Tell me about how it felt, and how it happened when your husband proposed to you?

(LAUGHTER)

**N SMABY:** If anybody knows Gary very well, this will not come as a surprise. We had decided we wanted to do a global semester and we wanted to be able to have our own place when we were traveling and there was no chance that unmarried students were going to be able to stay together. So, Gary and I decided, to you know, why don’t we get married. He comes up with kind of a sheet with the pros about why we are getting married earlier than after we graduate. He went into the hotel room where the whole family was celebrating a big event for his dad and Gary goes… he brings out these bright yellow sheets of paper out and says, ‘Nanci and I have decided that we are going to get married and the reasons are this.’ (LAUGHS)

**N SMABY:** I know Arlette that you’re looking for a little romantic type stuff but it wasn’t.

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** That has its own kind of romance. What it does is, it adds to me for you and the relationship you talk about with him, it adds to the safety. I want to point out something that I don’t know if you acknowledged for yourself as you say that in particular the end, you said, it opened my eyes. What I realized is that it tells basically who you are because there is a fair amount of people that would go to an experience like that and would shut them down and all they would want to do is sit down in their little farm or house and stay in a bubble. Instead, it opened your eyes and you wanted to learn more. So, I think I want to encourage you to recognize that, that is really who you are. The other wonderful thing about your story is how you were able to trust and lean on your husband, Gary. That is, to me the whole thing of life… Hahaha… grand unified theory.

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** Is let’s find a safe place to put our love and that is the first thing an infant is looking for. Where is the safe place for me to put my love? When you find that it changes everything in the world. Somehow, everything becomes safer—

**N SMABY:** Yeah.

**A POLAND:** And that is when you feel that kind of safety then you are able to open. So, I want to applaud both of you for giving that to each other and the kind of character that you have and that you bring to class as well.

**N SMABY:** Thank you. Do you know what is so bizarre? I just wrote an email to… I have five sisters… well five girls in my family. My mom died 11 years ago and she was 100 when she died and it was time for her to go but talking about that whole love, she gave it to me. I mean and I have an identical twin. We have always had a tremendous love for each other but that is so interesting that you put it that way because I have feelings and how lucky I was to have the mom that I had and that I can still celebrate her with my four siblings and with my two girls that we have.

**A POLAND:** Yeah. That’s really wonderful and it shows me another thing that we have in common besides white hair.

(LAUGHTER)

**A POLAND:** My mom was months short of 101 when she died.

**N SMABY:** Oh wow!

**A POLAND:** Yeah and she was pretty popular. She had a whole fan club including some people of the family that were all from overseas. They were from Europe and some of the family from Europe came over for a surprise. She had a 100th birthday party but she knew she was going to have to party, but she didn't know it was going to be such a big deal and that the family from Europe a few members, representatives came over for the party. She was pretty excited and it was really wonderful and she said to me afterward “You know, I wrote up a whole thing about what I wanted you to do for the celebration of life for me after I die but you just hit it.”

(LAUGHTER)

**N SMABY:** Oh, that is so cool! Talking about some of these ideas, we both have an understanding of the Enneagram. The enneagram is the personality. I call it kind of the study of how we interact dependent on what type we are. I have a feeling we are similar types. I have always felt that that is probably why we connect so well because we are outgoing and quite extroverted.

(LIGHT CHUCKLE)

**A POLAND:** Well let me jump in there just a quick second Nanci. Actually, I am not an extrovert.

**N SMABY:** Oh really?

**A POLAND:** In the enneagram I am not, I am an introvert. The difference is that I can speak in front of a group.

**N SMABY:** Yeah.

**A POLAND:** My husband would say put her on a stage, give her a microphone, she will talk about anything to whatever size group. The ten the thousand, it does not matter. If you put me at a party—we had a party here for his graduation of a certificate thing. After I get everything set up for the party, it’s people who I know were here for him, and I sit at the far end of the yard, holding my dog.

**N SMABY:** Has that always been the case?

**A POLAND:** It has always, always, always. If I have a reason to be there, if I am working it for some then there is no problem because I can be that. COVID works well for me because I can be a recluse. It might be because I was adopted, and I was almost dead when I was adopted, almost a year. Maybe something got because they talk about that first year being so important and being able to be with people, community, and stuff like that. When I look at what I was doing, my mom brought me home from the orphanage, I was committing suicide. I was refusing food.

**N SMABY:** Wow.

**A POLAND:** So, I had already given up.

**N SMABY:** Wow.

**A POLAND:** And so, that’s I guess already in me. I was an only child and we moved around all the time because my dad was in the military. So, I had no problem being alone a lot.

**N SMABY:** Arlette—

**A POLAND:** So, I am an introvert. All of that long thing says actually, it looks like I’m an extrovert because of my teaching but

**N SMABY:** It sure does.

**A POLAND:** If all of a sudden, in a social situation, I would be in the corner.

**N SMABY:** Huh.

**A POLAND:** In fact, in my last podcast and my last home, I actually talk about that. The way that I would say and it is possibly politically incorrect to say but I was a reject of the reject group in high school. I mean and what they thought was funny and what they thought was a big deal, I did not. I did everything I could to fake it. What I did was, I skipped a year. I skipped 11th grade.

**N SMABY:** Well why not?

**A POLAND:** All I got was A’s and made sure to take extra classes at night, in summer, morning or whatever it took, and got the hell out of there.

**N SMABY:** So, when you talk about your different selves that you’ve created, is there something that creates or kind of helps motivate that change into a new self. Obviously, your art but your other types of selves, would you recognize what creates those, that change?

**A POLAND:** I think I have to start my answer with something that I think you probably already know about me as a Buddhist, I absolutely without question, I believe in reincarnation. That is not a question, it isn’t something I believe in, it is a fact. To me the shifting from one expression of myself or add new expressions in, however you want to look at it, has as much to do with karma because the painting… I happened to take OLLI about what was it, four to five years ago. OLLI had in February one of those wine and paint things. It was for any member and also for faculty at Cal State. It was in one of the rooms I would often teach and I had just been zooming through since then. So, it has really taken hold this year.

**N SMABY:** You know the thing that is so interesting Arlette, I have found COVID has really helped with this. I find that when we are in this distant but very connected. I mean I am talking to you more than I have ever talked to you in your life because you are always surrounded by students who have question after class etc. So, I have just valued this and I have my curriculum committee. I got to know people on our committee that I have never really truly not known.

**A POLAND:** I am glad that you mentioned that because that is kind of my experience too. Not just with you right now which is totally awesome but I find that in my teaching at CoD as a professor teaching completely online, I can actually interact with students more because when they post on the discussion board and I can respond to each student or a group or exchange, whereas teaching at CoD than when I see them twice a week. I put them in small groups and I don’t get to respond to anybody or to a group that goes in the right direction or that is supporting each other especially in deserving acknowledgement or whatever. So, I agree. There are definitely some positive things about online experience.

**N SMABY:** I have found that it is just how smart so many of these people are. It just further helps me accept and almost celebrate this aging process to be in this community where obviously a lot of people do have health issues and other issues but they have never given up their idea of learning. I mean their resilience and Real interest in being part of a group that honors this tradition. They are my role models, if you guys can do it then I sure can do it. I just feel so lucky that I am a part of this community.

**A POLAND:** Yeah, I agree with you entirely Nanci. There is another thing we have in common. My mom was forty and my dad was just barley forty when they adopted me. I also had older parents but I have to say I never noticed it.

**N SMABY:** Yeah.

**A POLAND:** So, I totally understand being comfortable around older people from early on and this experience with OLLI sort of carries that forward.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** This experience keeps reminding us of treasure in the experience of people who have lived longer in time.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**L KENDALL:** As we mentioned Dr. Arlette Poland is a fellow podcaster. So, we asked her about her show.

**A POLAND:** My podcast is titled *Listen Within: Moments of Kindness in This Pandemic Storm.* It has become my way of urging kindness into our world right now. The podcast is basically five day of music original poetry and kindness of how and why it requires action.

**L KENDALL:** and the show just like this one, *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI* is available for listening and subscription on any podcast platform.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**L KENDALL:** This has been *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. Our thanks to Cal State San Bernardino in Palm Desert along with the media students. This podcast was produced by Lou Gorfain and I am Lacey Kendall.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC FADES)