

A Warm Defense on a Cold Day

Prof. Reima Al-Jarf

My defense was scheduled at 3:00 p.m., November 25, 1985. It was a cold and cloudy day and we were expected to have freezing rain for the first time in five years. Although I was excited about my defense, I was a bit nervous. So I went to my advisor for moral support. She was warm and smiling as usual and assured me that everything would be fine. She asked me not to be defensive if any of my examiners was critical, but rather to thank him for his comment and ask how I could correct the point and make it better. Moreover, she asked me to go to the library and find an article that one of my examiners had published, read it and be ready for any possible questions about it. So I did.

Around lunchtime, I went home, had lunch, took off my snow boots and put on a new dress and a pair of new shoes that my mother had sent me for the occasion. Since we were having freezing rain, slipping and falling down was very likely. I did not expect anything to happen and thought that I would be fine as I was not going to walk very far to the bus stop, which was only a few yards away from my apartment. I also thought that getting off the bus would not be a problem, since I did not have to walk a long distance to the college building.

After holding my thesis and other documents close to my heart, I walked slowly and cautiously on the grass. But the minute I set my foot on the sidewalk, I slipped and my elbow hit the sidewalk so hard. I felt an electric shock go through my whole arm and it started to hurt so badly.

Despite the pain, I got up, collected my papers and took the bus.

I got off by the mall, which was close to the College of Education, went to the flower shop, and bought a big flower bouquet for my advisor in spirit of appreciation for what she had done for me. I went to the secretary's office and asked her to put it in my advisor's office after leaving for the defense. I asked the secretary to make sure that my advisor does not see it, as I wanted to surprise her.

Shortly before I went to the Conference Room where the defense was to be held, my friends Jessie and Edith had a surprise for me. They gave me a flower bouquet and we took pictures together. Soon we headed toward the Conference Room. Although the defense is usually private, my uncle, and few of my friends attended my defense, as I was a foreign student. Soon, my six examiners arrived and we all sat around a large oval table. They all praised the high quality work I had done and expressed their admiration for how much time and effort I put into my thesis. My thesis was almost perfect. They had nothing to critique whether at the linguistic or methodological level. So they just asked me to give a summary of my study without orally and asked questions about how I could apply the results of my study in teaching ESL. I was able to answer all the questions with confidence and ease and as I responded to questions my advisor gave a sign of approval and admiration by smiling. Before the end of the defense, the guests and myself were asked to leave the room. So we left and waited outside. In few minutes, we were asked to re-enter and my advisor announced that I had passed with distinction. Before leaving the room, my friend Duangrudi took pictures of me with my

examiners. Then my uncle and friends hugged me and soon we all left, as it was 5:00 p.m.

Throughout the defense, I forgot all about my elbow and did not want the pain to spoil the occasion. As soon as I got home, I started to feel the pain in my elbow. I was unable to hold anything in my hand, even my coffee mug. The following day, I went to the clinic, the doctor examined my elbow and had some x-rays taken. There was no fracture, just a severe trauma. After a month, my elbow recovered, however, reminding me that roses always bloom among thorns.