

Lee Richmond: A Life Designed to Take the Counseling Profession to New Places

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The authors demonstrate the practice of composing a life portrait by conducting a Career Construction Interview (CCI; Savickas, 2011) with Lee Richmond. Counselors conduct a CCI to compose life portraits for clients who are making career transitions. Using client responses to the CCI, counselors compose a biography highlighting themes that show the continuity and coherence in a life story. Clients then use their life portraits to script the next chapter in their careers. The authors chose to interview Dr. Richmond to record her contributions to the discipline of career counseling and highlight her role as a mentor to 3 generations of counselors.

The first author had just begun her first-ever roundtable presentation at a national conference when a woman with a gentle smile sat down to join the conversation. During the presentation, she was encouraging. Afterward, she stayed to chat and invited me to coffee. I learned her name, Lee Richmond, and recognized that she had been a president of the National Career Development Association (NCDA; 1988–1989) and the American Counseling Association (ACA; 1992–1993). Initially, I was intimidated, but her kindness put me at ease. After we parted, I thought that I must learn who this woman is, how she got this way, and how I can become like her. After benefitting from several conversations with her at conferences, I had the courage to ask if I might interview her to learn about her life-career path. Reluctantly, she agreed, humbly saying that she did not deserve to be singled out. I had learned that she was a colleague of David Tiedeman (Richmond & Pope, 2008), the first constructionist career theorist and counselor. Thus, I suggested that our conversation include a Career Construction Interview (CCI; Savickas, 2011; <http://vocopher.com/CSI/CCI.pdf>) so that I could learn the truths of her life as well as give shape to her stories in the form of a life portrait. Wanting to ensure that I conducted a good interview, I recruited a faculty member from my doctoral program, Tracy Lara, to assist me in preparing for the interview and its publication.

Going Places to Help People Who Hurt

The most important of the five questions in the CCI asks for early recollections. The intent is to learn the perspective that a person takes on life and identify major life themes. Lee's first story described her mother coming home from the hospital with her new sister. Lee said,

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I may have been jealous of the newborn displacing me in the family. I used to play with sandpaper. I tried to make rocks smooth with sandpaper. I tried to smooth the baby's hand with the sandpaper and her hands bled. The baby cried. That is when I decided that I did not want to hurt people anymore. I remember it because of the emotional impact my behavior had on others.

Lee's second story involved her cousin, Gordon. Lee said,

Together, we got a box from the grocery store. It was a wooden box with a piece of wood down the center which made two wonderful seats for us. The box was in the cellar but we traveled all over the world. It was our airline. We used our imagination to travel the world in that box. Gordon would always sit in front of the box and I would always sit in the back. This always made me angry.

Later during the interview I learned that Lee's original occupational preference was airline pilot. When I asked what drew her to that occupation, she said,

The same things that drew me to flying an airplane in the basement . . . imagination, adventure, speed, nontraditional for women, independence. As a matter of fact, when I was 14 years old, I had saved enough money from babysitting to take a train and cab to the airport in Washington to buy a plane ticket to fly back home to Baltimore. Later on, I wanted to be a historian and a writer.

Constructionist counselors have the participants interpret the meaning of their memories for themselves by composing a title for the story. Lee titled the sandpaper incident as "I Didn't Mean to Hurt You" and the airplane flights as "Going Places." So, we have her perspective on life: go places to help others, and do not hurt anyone. Typically, a painful early story tells us what the person will not become. For example, if it is full of fear, the person will not be fearful. Instead, the person becomes brave. So, Lee's fundamental perspective or life theme is to not hurt people, but instead to help people and comfort those who bleed and cry out in pain. It also involves welcoming people and making them feel a sense of belonging, as she did for the first author at the conference. From the second story, we learn the importance of three things: being on the go, using imagination, and not taking a back seat to men. These themes and values characterize Lee's career. She reaches out to the hurt and, in her role as a professor and counselor, she teaches others to do the same.

Lee is particularly sensitive to counseling women and advocating for equality so they do not have to be put in the back seat. In her dissertation research (Richmond, 1972), she studied colleges that offered programs for returning women students, particularly at community colleges. As Lee stated, "I have since been interested in nontraditional careers for women" or placing women in the driver's seat. On the basis of her research, Lee designed an imaginative program to support women returning to campus, a program that was copied by several community colleges across Maryland. She noted parenthetically that her early research taught her the importance of math skills for girls and women.

Lee stays on the go. She continues to travel the world, going to places to bring counseling ideas to her colleagues in the counseling profession. She sees her international work as full of adventure. For example, Lee traveled frequently to Japan during a 10-year period as a consultant

and trainer, bringing to another culture the work of John Holland, her friend since their time together at Johns Hopkins University. She also urges counselors to take counseling to new places. There may not be sufficient jobs in schools and colleges for all of the counselors being trained. However, if they use their imagination to think outside the box, there are numerous venues to ply their profession. For example, Lee has worked part-time for 28 years as a corporate career consultant, program developer, and trainer. From 1886 to 2008, Lee and Linda Kemp brought the life-career ideas of Anna Miller-Tiedeman and David Tiedeman to employees of the U.S. Postal Service (Richmond, 1991). She hopes that in the future, more counselors will be able to use their skills in organizations. Lee hopes that new professionals do not limit their options to a particular venue, such as schools or mental health clinics. They can apply their counseling expertise in places such as hospitals, physicians' offices, corporations, and charitable organizations.

The Grit to Handle Difficult Situations

The second question in the CCI seeks to understand the models an individual used to coconstruct the self. To construct herself as a person who could go places to help people, Lee had to choose role models who did not hurt people, but rather helped and respected them. Furthermore, she needed models that went places and spoke out for human rights, especially advocating for women who would not let men place them in the back seat. She imagined a world different from the one in which she grew up. In describing their models for self-construction, individuals choose adjectives that, although they describe the model, more importantly describe concepts of the self or characteristics which they themselves strive to enact. As Lee formed herself, who did she use as models for self-construction and identity development?

When Lee was asked who she admired as a little girl, she quickly responded that it was her grandmother. Lee described her maternal grandmother, and thus herself, as being "resourceful, strong, and humble." Lee continued, "She was an amazing woman. She had emigrated from Russia, and her husband had emigrated from Austria, so there was a difference. She was of peasant stock, and he was a merchant. Although both were immigrants, they differed tremendously." A second role model was the actress Greer Garson. Lee admired Garson's "ability to use language and her diction. She was versatile and very funny. I admired her graciousness and style; she had striking poise if not beauty." Third was Eleanor Roosevelt. Lee admired

her ability to handle difficult things, like the first two women. I also admired her ability to speak to large audiences, using language skills, to influence people. She showed social openness and social consciousness when not all people did so. She had a sense of purpose in the world, for the good of many people. All three of them had guts.

Incorporating traits from her models, Lee constructed a self that was built around a sense of purpose in the world—one focused on helping other people, especially women and disadvantaged groups. The recognition of and respect for individual differences and cultural

diversity learned from her grandmother is something that Lee developed into her purpose in the world. To enact such social openness and consciousness, Lee cultivated courage, or, in her word, “strength.” Lee found this strength in her models. In understanding an individual’s core characteristics, one listens for repeated words among the descriptions of role models. Lee helped this process by identifying two characteristics that all three of her models shared. First they “had the ability to handle difficult things.” To do so, they had “guts.” In her career, first and foremost, Lee has shown the guts to deal with difficult things. She developed the resourcefulness and strength to speak out and act to advocate and advance the position of women and diverse groups. To do so effectively, she developed outstanding language skills along with the poise to speak to and influence large audiences. She is too humble to recognize it, but, similar to her grandmother, she is an amazing woman—and a gracious one as well.

Lee’s 70 articles and book chapters show her resourcefulness and facility with language. The four titles of her most recent publications reflect her versatile interests: “Gender and Women” (Rayburn & Richmond, 2013); “Spirituality in Applied Settings: Work and Family” (Richmond, 2012); “Counseling European Americans” (Richmond, 2003); and “Self-Esteem and the Third Phase of Life” (Richmond & Guindon, 2009). Her effectiveness in addressing large groups may be surmised from her 185 presentations at professional meetings. She also has the ability to influence an audience, of course; after all, she has served as president of ACA and NCDA. In addition, she has been an influential leader in the Maryland Psychological Association and president of the Maryland Association for Counseling and Development (2003–2004) as well as the Maryland Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors (1978–1979). When asked what she learned from her leadership experiences, Lee responded, “As a leader, I learned that professional organizations are important to the people in them, yet ultimately even more important to the world they serve. That is why it is critical that they stay true to their missions.” Lee’s career achievements on behalf of others have been recognized through her receiving the NCDA Eminent Career Award (2002) and Fellow status in both ACA (2006) and NCDA (2001).

Many Decisions in Life Vie Between Growth and Safety

The third question in the CCI pursues the individual’s interests, not inventoried but manifest, by asking about favorite television shows and magazines. From her favorite shows, Lee surmised that “I like information.” She watches the History Channel and news programs because they are both informative. She also enjoys British comedies because they are funny. The other indicator of manifest interests is favorite magazines. Lee’s quest for information and resources continues as she reads all of the professional counseling journals and, for humor, the *New Yorker*. Not to be missed as a trait from her role model Garson and in her current interest in British comedies is Lee’s appreciation of humor. She uses humor quite effectively in her teaching, counseling, and leadership roles, along with using it as a personal coping mechanism.

Lee uses her great store of information as a resource in her teaching. On her way to becoming a historian, Lee needed to make money to help support her daughter and a husband who was in school. She went to the Department of Employment of Security in downtown Baltimore without knowing which kind of work to seek. The employment counselor said to her, "Well, your college degrees in history and English do not correspond to anything we have other than teaching." The counselor referred Lee to a teaching position, which she secured. Lee began her career by teaching high school English and history in Baltimore for 6 years beginning in 1963, and she also served as a school counselor during the latter 3 years. She had become a counselor because so many female students sought her advice on personal issues. Because Lee did not know how best to help them, she enrolled in a school counseling program. Following her master's of education degree, she enrolled in a doctoral program. She said,

I put history aside for a while and enrolled at the University of Maryland to become a counselor educator. In many ways, I wanted to become a counselor educator because of my admiration for Kitty Cole [ACA's Human Rights Award is named in Cole's honor] and Thelma Daly [a social activist and ACA past president], as well as the encouragement of Alejandro Rodriguez, the chief of pediatric psychiatry at Hopkins where I was working part-time.

From 1969 to 1976, Lee taught psychology at two different community colleges in Maryland. Lee earned her doctorate in 1973, taking more courses in human development, sociology, and physiology than in counseling. Joseph Samler, a part-time instructor, was the one counseling professor who influenced Lee during her doctoral studies. She said,

Samler had studied with and was a friend of Abraham Maslow. He is the one who told me that many decisions in life are a choice between growth on the one hand and safety on the other hand. You always have to choose one or the other. You cannot quite balance them. And I had to decide that. And it was a real important decision because it led to my divorce.

In 1976, Lee began her tenure as a professor of education in counseling and human development at Johns Hopkins University, where she created the doctoral program in counseling and development. Ten years later, Lee moved to her current position as a professor of education and director for the school counseling program at Loyola University, Maryland. In addition, she serves as an affiliate faculty member in Loyola's Pastoral Counseling Program. In these positions, Lee teaches classes in Career Counseling, Group Counseling, Family Counseling, and Pastoral Counseling. As a humanistic counselor, Lee prefers the social constructionist epistemology, believes in the basic principles stated by Carl Rogers, and takes a transtheoretical approach using narrative techniques and creative interventions. She writes on topics including career counseling, women's issues, and spirituality. Furthermore, Lee continues to follow the lead of her middle-school heroine, Nancy Drew, in choosing to investigate and research important issues and constructs. Lee offered that "when I was a kid, I liked Nancy Drew stories because she was always adventurous in figuring out stuff. I still like mystery stories to this day." In this

regard, she has, along with her collaborator and friend Carole Rayburn, copyrighted eight psychological assessment instruments.

Each Person Needs Different Things

The fourth question in the CCI seeks to understand the script that individuals are currently living or a role that they are preparing to enter. The question asks individuals to name their current favorite story, either from a book or a movie, and then tell it in their own words. Lee's current favorite book is *The Family Orchard* (Eve, 2000), which

tells the story of six generations of a family who lived in Israel on a small plot of land that was an orchard. On the surface, the story is about what occurred in Israel over that time period. However, at a deeper level, the orchard represents a metaphor for how life ought to be. Each plant needs different things . . . somewhat like people.

Lee views feeding and pruning the plants in the orchard as a metaphor for what counselors do when they help people who want to live their lives more fully. Today, Lee nurtures individual students and clients according to their needs, not hers. Lee also believes strongly that counseling is a place for spirituality. Lee was one of the first writers to introduce the connection between spirituality and work to the counseling profession. Lee said that, to her,

Spirituality means purpose, meaning, mattering, and a sense of who we are as human beings. How people value themselves and others is a spiritual thing. Spirituality drives a way of life for people, much the same as Super and Tiedeman meant when they wrote about life-career and I learned from my mentor, Thelma Daley.

Lee's commitment to the importance of spirituality led to her most recent leadership role—president (2012–2013) of the Maryland Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling.

Lee encouraged the first author to read her current second favorite book, *The Red Tent* (Diamant, 1997). She said, "It tells an untold story—the story behind the story. It's about women having a voice and being able to speak." The red tent provides a safe space where women gather together to renew themselves through sharing deep and moving stories about their lives. In the tent, women support, honor, and celebrate each other as they discuss stories they do not wish to speak about in other places. In *The Red Tent*, we find a biblical version of Lee's college support groups for returning women. For Lee, this current favorite story resonates with her tireless efforts to amplify women's voices and place women in the driver's seat of their lives.

It's Not So Terrible

The fifth and final question in the CCI asks for a favorite saying or motto. The interviewer considers the saying in the context of the whole story and regards it as the person's advice to self. Lee needs strength to keep going places she has never been, advocating for social openness, fighting for women's equality, and fostering spirituality. Lee's advice to herself continues to be the motto she learned from her grandmother:

My grandmother used to say “it’s not so terrible.” When I fell down and was bleeding, she would say, “It’s not so terrible,” meaning it’s not awful. I don’t mean that there are not terrible things that go on in the world, but the things that go on in MY everyday are not so terrible. It’s like “don’t sweat the small stuff.” I have kept that motto in mind, always.

We could hear the sweetness, strength, and encouragement of her grandmother alive in Lee’s voice as she beautifully spoke the words, “It’s not so terrible.” In faculty positions and leadership roles, Lee has had her share of setbacks and disappointment—“falling down” and “bleeding.” Yet, rather than becoming demoralized, she realized it’s not so terrible and got up to try again. A humble, strong, and humorous counselor educator, Lee encourages future counselors to do the same.

Imagining the Future

To close the interview, we asked Lee, “What’s next?” She responded, “I am going to be taking a sabbatical to examine the profession of school counseling.” When asked what is most meaningful to her right now, she responded, “Being a good grandmother is really important to me.” As we said goodbye, Lee said, “Enjoy your work in the counseling profession. It’s a good life, and even in the darkest days when things that should go right don’t, ‘it’s not so terrible.’” With these words, Lee struck us as an amazing grandmother for both her family and the counseling profession.

Having heard Lee reconstruct her life in the form a portrait, we needed a title for this profile. At first we thought “It’s Not So Terrible,” but we realized that title would confuse individuals who only skimmed the Table of Contents. We thought more about Lee’s life and career theme of going places to help people. It finally dawned on us that Lee not only went places herself, but she has led the counseling profession itself to new places. She has been a pioneer of constructionist career counseling theory and practice; took Holland’s model and materials to Japan; created and advanced support programs for women returning to college; introduced the topic of spirituality to career counselors; started a new doctoral program in counseling at Johns Hopkins University; brought career development programming to the U.S. Postal Service, and served as president for five counseling associations. As a woman who likes to go places, Lee has taken her colleagues and profession with her as she imagined new ideas, gave voice to the silenced, created innovative services and programs, and brought counseling to new venues. It seemed right to honor and celebrate Lee’s leadership by entitling this life portrait “Lee Richmond: A Life Designed to Take the Counseling Profession to New Places.”

Postscript

The first author maintains contact with Lee through telephone conversations and meetings at conferences. She continues to teach me about the profession of counseling and how to be a better counselor. In addition to wisdom gained by a lifetime of experience, Lee offers me psychosocial support as I pursue professional opportunities and challenges that seem daunting. Today, I am privileged to call her my mentor.

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