May PLB

“All the department news that’s fit to print, and other stuff.”

May Edition

It’s the end of another great academic year!

Have a great summer!

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- Ken Kotovsky, master teacher
- Pictures of Ken with hair
- A PLB exclusive interview with Avis Kotovsky!
- Advisor-Advisee Similarities?
Ken Kotovsky: the man behind the teaching

Psychology Professor Ken Kotovsky won the prestigious H&SS Elliot Dunlop Smith teaching award this year. This prestigious award is given out annually to recognize great teaching and leadership at Carnegie Mellon University.

In tribute to Ken’s achievement, the PLB now asks the bold question, who is this man? Is he really that good? In the next couple of pages, you’ll find never-before-seen pictures chronicling Ken through the years, some remembrances, and a PLB-exclusive interview with Ken’s wife, Avis Kotovsky! This in-depth investigative reporting could perhaps be some of the PLB’s finest yet.

Thank you to those who contributed to honoring Ken in this report, you know who you are! And congratulations Ken on your achievement, and all that you do for the department!

— David Creswell, PLB Editor

Former professor Nick Yeung describes Ken. "I care about my own advisees, and maybe the students in my classes. Some of them. But Ken seems to care in an unconditional manner. IF you are in undergrad, THEN he cares about you."

Ken Kotovsky in High School

JOHN KORCH—Special Shop; Intramural Sports

BETH ELAINE KOSTMAN—Gift Committee; Homeroom Secretary-Treasurer, 11th Grade; Vice President 9th Grade; Foreword Representative; M.M.M.; 4th Period Hall Patrol; Red Cross Council; Junior Glee Club; Junior Leaders; Special Dance; F.T.A.; College Club; Chorus 1; Basketball, Soccer ’53; Athletic Award; Gregg Typing and Shorthand Awards; Betty Crocker Homemaking Contest

KENNETH KOTOVSKY—Homeroom Vice President 11B; President 11A; Camera Club; Radio Club; Band 4; Advanced Electric Shop; Special Shop

MARY LOUISE KOVACS—Senior Leaders, Vice President; Junior Dance; Junior Leaders; Advanced Clothing; Modern Creative Dance; Hockey; Basketball; Volley Ball; Softball ’54-’56; Hockey Championship ’55; Athletic Award

MICHAEL E. KOVARSKY—Prom Committee; Homeroom Secretary 12B; Spanish Club, Treasurer; Student Council Representative; Woodcarving Club; Senior Discussion Club; Square Dance Club; Drivers Training Club; Wood Shop Foreman; Gregg Typing Award; Foreword Staff; KDKA-TV Math Show; Civic Club Test

LORRAINE A. KRAMER—Homeroom Secretary, 9th Grade; Future Nurses of America, Treasurer; Hall Patrol; Red Cross Council; Student Council Social Committee; Junior Glee Club; Chorus 1; Volley Ball, Softball ’53; Athletic Award

Ken’s highschool yearbook picture. The pictures confirm that Ken had a full head of hair at one time. Diligent readers may notice that Ken had an early proclivity toward leadership (President of 11A!)

The PLB invites submissions describing what “Special Shop” means.
Ken’s College Years

“For Fuck's Sake”

One of my fellow graduate students at Wisconsin had been a CMU undergrad. When she found out I was taking the job here, she was very excited that I would be meeting Ken Kotovsky. She said, "I met with him all the time to try and figure out my career, and I always remember him saying, whenever he got excited, 'for fuck's sake, Sarah.' As in, 'for fuck's sake, that's a terrible idea!' So when you talk with him, try and get him to say for fuck's sake!"

Scared of Ken?

The last time I taught developmental research methods, one of the students was taking her second research methods course. She had struggled in her first one, but did much better in this class. She came to my office hours one day to say that she really appreciated the fact that the major required her to take two research methods courses. One just hadn’t been enough for her, but after two, she felt really confident. I told her she should mention that to Ken Kotovsky, since he coordinates the undergrad program, and he would appreciate hearing it. She looked pensive for a second, and then said, "OK, I'll do it. I can do it. I'm not scared of Ken Kotovsky like some of the other girls are." I asked her why anyone would be scared of Ken, and she said, "I don't know if you know this, but I've heard that he swears a lot. Some people think he must be pretty angry to swear so much."

Ken has always loved sailing. Fortunately his fashion sense has evolved. Is that a snake around his neck?

Ken and Skiing

According to Brooke, Ken has been known to fool inexperienced skiers onto black diamond slopes by telling them that they're actually really easy slopes. This apparently happened to her once, causing her to be 'very scared.' Ken disputes this, but the fact remains, Brooke rarely goes skiing any more.
Ken’s Early Years as a Professor

PLB Interview with Avis Kotovsky

PLB editor David Creswell interviewed Ken’s wife, Avis Kotovsky, this month in order to learn about the man behind the myth.

DC: I’m sure you must be very proud of Ken, his work, and in particular his recent college teaching award. What were your feelings when you heard that Ken won the teaching award?

AK: I am very proud of Ken, and am delighted that he is being formally recognized for his talent and dedication to teaching. At the start of each semester, Ken is as excited about the possibilities as any new freshman. Amazing, given he has been doing this for more than double the years of age of a traditional undergraduate student. Not only does he love the CMU community, psych department and classes; he loves the kids. He is challenged to assist the troubled student and enjoys celebrating the achievements of young scholars. Graduation is always a mixed bag for Ken. He is pleased to share this great day with kids and their families, but hates to see the new alumnæ leave.

DC: How long have you been married to Ken? Did he show any signs of promise as a smart and capable guy early in your marriage?

A type of donkey?
At one point, the most recent review of Ken Kotovsky on ratemyprofessor.com read "Ken Kotovsky is kind of an ass."
AK: Ken and I were college sweethearts. Yes, he was always smart and capable, funny and highly social. When dating, he was the president of his college dorm and initiated innovative academic and social events throughout the year. This was no small task. Ask him about the great speakers that visited the dorm, the Shakespearean play in the courtyard, the great parties, and the architectural restructuring (Tearing down the walls!) of the dorm. He even had the nerds taking ballroom dance lessons! However, I would be remiss to not tell you he ran out of gas on our first date… on a motorcycle!

DC: Some say that Ken liberally uses colorful language in his everyday conversations and in the classroom. Do you think this is a ploy he uses to trick students into thinking he’s cool? Does he swear like a sailor at home?

AK: The swearing makes me crazy! Our grandsons (age 8 and 11 years) made a sign to pin on Papa’s back proclaiming “This man swears!” In a recent conversation on the topic, Benjamin (age 11) said, “It is a funny habit. Although inappropriate, it is amusing. We need to warn little kids about this.” Later in the conversation he said that he thought he his 3-year-old cousin swear.

DC: Are there any other thoughts or memories you’d like to share about Ken?

I will echo the words of our oldest grandson. “He is supportive and encouraging. He has helped me move on through lots of things in life… like bike riding”. I will add, he has helped me and our children strive to reach our fullest potential. This extends to his students.

AK: If you lived in this house, you would share the view. Poor Ken is always carting the “live cage” across rivers with the latest catch. He releases them with a pound of peanuts in the shell, and best wishes in their new home. The pink insulation continues to be strewn on the lawn.

Please get a dog, Ken

Ken Kotovsky is so skilled at teaching and dealing with all types of students that his colleagues have been hoping (for many years) that this skill would translate into effectiveness at dealing with squirrels. Because it has become clear that this translation is unlikely to happen in our lifetimes, Ken’s colleagues have come up with the perfect solution for his squirrel problem: Ken should get a puppy to chase his squirrels away!

PLB readers are encouraged to submit recommendations for the type of dog Ken and Avis should get.

Ken with son Jack, at Jack’s college graduation

Feature detector?

Ken claims not to see the internal features of people’s faces. Once, for example, he and I were talking about eye doctors. He then asked me whether I had ever been one to get my vision tested, or to get a prescription. I was a bit perplexed, and pointed to my glasses. He squinted at them for a few seconds and said, "Yeah, I guess you probably have."
This is an automatically generated text.
Staff Council Tagline Contest
As a result of a campus-wide contest, Staff Council now has a new tagline: “Advocacy. Involvement. Impact.” The tagline, created by SC Rep Tara Reinoehl (SEI), will grace Council’s future promotional efforts.

Volunteer Opportunity
The SC Walking Club is asking for volunteer walk leaders to lead walks during weekday lunch hours. If you’re looking for some external motivation to keep up with your own walking routine, this might be a nice fit for you. Any CMU staff person can lead walks, and you need not commit to all days. Walks are local and maps are offered in advance to guide you. We are currently down from 5 days to only 2 days a week due to a lack of walk leaders. SC often pays for a luncheon social event for the Club at the end of the year, and sometimes giveaways like T-shirts and pedometers. Contact Joe Imbimbo at joei@andrew to sign up.

Save the Date

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Your other H&SS Representative, Eileen Simeone, is happy to hear from you at eileens@andrew.cmu.edu

PLB Shout-Out!

The PLB wants to shout-out Charles Kemp for his efforts in organizing the Psychology Competition at the Meeting of the Minds. Charles made sure everyone was on time and in the right place, and orchestrated separate competitions for posters and talks, a move everyone agreed was positive. Additionally, he invented a new sandwich that all of the judges (David R., Erik T., Vicki H., Ken K., and Paula F.) agreed was likely to be delicious; don't be surprised if the 'CK on Rye' takes the nation's delis by storm.

Thanks for all the hard work, Charles! It was another great year at Meeting of the Minds.

- Erik Thiessen

Charles Kemp thinking about his CK on Rye
Advisor-Student Similarity

Birds of a feather flock together, the old saying goes. We sought to test this theory with a quick sample from the department. Here are the data, now you decide!

Ken Kotovsky – Matt Wood

- Both put on a good show. Possible shared thespian ancestry?
- They enjoy asking really hard questions and seeing how long (if ever) undergraduates take to figure them out.
- Who can’t visualize them both sitting back and enjoying some cigars?
- Matt still has some work to do before winning a ‘best professor ever’ award. It’s a long journey, but the PLB believes in you Matt!

David Klahr – Bryan Matlen

- Both are interested in resolving how problems are solved.
- Both have sported stylin’ beards
- Both can lift two times their bodyweight (three times if the mass constitutes children learning by discovery)
- David Klahr has yet to describe any of his results as ‘rocking tasty hardcore’.

Charles Kemp – Alan Jern

- Their first and last names are ordered alphabetically
- Disregarding Bayes’ rule is considered blasphemy
- Both their homes were adjacent to the Pacific Ocean
- As seen in a past issue of the PLB, Alan can do a sweet impression of an Australian. Whether Charles can do an equivalent impersonation of a Californian has yet to be observed.

Marlene Behrmann – Valentinos Zacharion

- Both came to Pittsburgh from afar
- Both have black hair
- Neither believes in a strictly bottom-up theory of visual perception
- Based on an informal survey, many in the department can’t tell the two apart. Possible twins separated at birth?
Summer Solstice!

For many of us, classwork, teaching, and grading are done for the year. The only thing to stand in the way of research is the fantastic Pittsburgh weather. Still, a little Vitamin D is an essential part of good health, and the PLB encourages a little fun in the sun. Not sure what to do? Never fear! We have prepared a few suggestions…

Video Kayaker

Don’t like the arid land where alpacas graze? Maybe the life of a video kayaker is for you then. Enjoy some warm sun, refreshing water, and exotic wildlife in its natural habitat.

If you need to code videos, this job may be just what you need to hone your skills for those crazy CMU subjects.

Alpaca Stud Farmer

Do we really need to comment?

Birthday Bump!

This month, two of our favorite developmental psychologists celebrate their birthdays. However, based on our scouring of birthday traditions on the internet, one of them might be glad to not be British:

“When it’s your birthday, your friends give you the “bumps” which is when they lift you in the air by your hands and feet and raise you up and down to the floor, one for each year, then one for luck, two for luck and three for the old man’s coconut! They usually will also drink “squash” which is an orange or lemon flavored Kool-Aid-type drink made from syrup (rather than a powder).”

Any volunteers?

Simulated Mission to Mars

If you are still opposed to getting outside, maybe you’d like to trade your Baker Hall office in for another confined space with few windows - a space capsule in a Russian warehouse! Help learn the social psychology necessary to avoid catastrophic personality clashes on a manned mission to Mars! No sunlight, guaranteed!
Michael Tarr and Laurie Heller accept faculty positions in the Dept!

Michael Tarr and Laurie Heller will be joining our faculty this summer, and Michael has accepted the Directorship of the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition (CNBC)! Please make sure to welcome them! Of course, the PLB will make every effort to interview both of them early next year. Stay tuned.

Michael’s work explores how humans visually learn, process, and recognize objects. In his job talk, Michael talked about visual expertise and described how although expert bird watchers were adept at identifying birds, they were poor at recognizing human faces (see Figure). Reactions to Michael’s talk were quite positive, although there were some murmurs among the birders in the audience about finding new hobbies. This work explains why Ken Kotovsky, a self-proclaimed expert squirrel-watcher, has trouble recognizing his wife and colleagues.

Laurie Heller’s work explores perception and audition, and how humans understand events through sound. For example, her perceptual experiments examine whether there are auditory prototypes that represent different event attributes, if these prototypes can predict psychological preference for exaggeration or the ability to recognize caricatures, and the role of audition in multi-modal events.

Welcome Michael and Laurie!

Have a great summer everyone!

Thanks for a great year! The PLB will be back in September. Please send your summer pictures and stories to David Creswell (creswell@cmu.edu).

I’ve had a great first year here, and I’ve enjoyed putting together the PLB this semester. The PLB is mostly dependent on your submissions and ideas, so please send me your contributions. And please let me know if there are things you like, don’t like, or would like to see covered in future PLBs. Thanks!

-David Creswell, PLB Editor

Hang 10 this summer!