

Louis Silvers

Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series

In the summer of 1995 I was reading the Chronicle of Higher Education and came across an ad for a Foreign Language instructor at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY. At the time I was working as a linguist for AT&T in Winston-Salem, NC, translating technical manuals and marketing materials, many of them related to the new marvel of technology: the internet. In the search for a position in my preferred field of teaching, I often went to the Wake-Forest University Library in the evenings to read “the Chronicle” and see if I could find my dream job announced in their want ads. The ad from MCC did not specify which language was needed, so I decided to apply for French and Spanish, and see what would happen anyway. I was very pleasantly surprised when, a couple of weeks later, I received a call inviting me to have an interview with the Chair of the Foreign Languages Department, for which I would have to travel to Rochester. To keep things within my budget, I made the decision to drive instead of flying, and set out on the 10-hour drive one sunny morning in early July.

Neither Google nor Apple Maps existed back then, so I had to rely on my trusted Rand McNally Road Atlas to show me the route, which it did quite successfully, and I was able to report on time for the interview with Maria Echaniz, the Department Chair. The conversation took place in her office, 5-432, where we talked for almost two hours about a variety of topics, ranging from my past experiences to my hopes for the future. I was so engaged in the conversation, and Maria was so friendly and warm that it didn’t feel like a job interview. Later in my career, when I interviewed candidates myself in that same office, I realized that she had deftly guided our conversation and had assessed my qualifications, the depth and breadth of my experience, and my potential to become a reliable and trustworthy member of the department. She must have liked what she saw, because a few days later I got the official call from the Vice President of Academic Services with an offer to join MCC as an Instructor in the Foreign Languages Department.

My earliest memories of my new position at MCC go back to the All College Day, when I was introduced to the college community as the “first new hire in the Foreign Languages Department in twenty-five years”, which must have been true, since the other three members of

the department –Maria Echaniz, Louise Rozwell and Ana Maria Rodriguez-- had all started working at MCC in the 1960s.

Now another twenty-five years have passed. As I find myself at the end of my career, I can honestly say that being a professor at MCC has been the best job I've ever had. And I've had many, starting as a bank clerk when I was 18 years old in my country of birth, Uruguay, plus several positions in private industry as a translator, in-service trainer, editor, teacher, market analyst and manager. It wasn't until I came to MCC that I found my passion and my professional niche, and could be all of those things together, with the addition of great colleagues, dedicated students and many opportunities for trying new ideas.

I have enjoyed my time at MCC immensely. There have been challenges here and there, but that is to be expected in any career. Throughout it all, however, I've had the support and friendship of many colleagues in different departments and areas of the college, and that has made my work a lot easier in the committees and task groups where I've served over the years. I've had the privilege of representing my department as their Chair for 15 years, and to see it venture and grow into new areas by adding more languages, pioneering online classes and seeking dual enrollment opportunities. Along the way, we hired new colleagues and welcomed more students, did quite a bit of "futuring", found ways to assess CLOs and adapted to new trends in language acquisition.

The hundreds of students that I had in my classes over the years have given meaning to my profession. I've seen them struggle with verb conjugations and unfamiliar new sounds, smile with pride when they succeeded in forming sentences, admire with wonder the cities and landscapes of other countries, and grow in confidence at overcoming a challenge. It has meant a lot to me to be the recipient of their "thank you" -- the best proof of a job well done.