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I'm the "Alexander" in Cox and Alexander

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When I was asked write an article about my experiences with Robyn Cox, I was happy to do so. The majority of my career in audiology, as a student and as an audiologist has been associated with her. Today, I am most known as the "Alexander" in "Cox and Alexander" references. Back when I worked as her research associate at the University of Memphis we had a running joke that I would not have to "write anything" as part of my job. It is a testament of my respect for her that I have finally agreed to write something.

I think I have a unique perspective on Robyn because I have known her for 40 years. I first met her when I was an undergraduate student and she was a new PhD instructor in audiology at the University of South Alabama. We were both child audiologists then. Later, she was my advisor and thesis director of my master's degree in audiology at the University of Memphis. Subsequently I worked for over 20 years as her research associate in the Hearing Aid Research Lab at the University of Memphis. To say that Robyn made a profound impact on both my career and personal life would be a considerable understatement.

It was a lucky break for me that I happened to meet her. She was only at South Alabama for one year. I had just transferred there and started my major in speech pathology. On the first day of Introduction to Audiology I immediately realized a couple of things. First of all, I should not try to use an excuse like "the dog ate my homework" with her. Secondly she was, hands down, the best teacher I ever had. Robyn was why I ended up in audiology instead of speech pathology … well, that and the fact that I wasn't very good at speech pathology.

What I really liked about Robyn's classes was that I was challenged to assume my responsibility for the learning process. Robyn expected the educational process to be a two-way street, and I had a responsibility to live up to those expectations. Her classes made me appreciate what higher education meant. I remember once observing her in clinic. My assignment was to write a clinical report for her hearing evaluation. Part of what she did included a process that I had never heard of or seen before. It was really exotic, I thought, something called "tympanometry." To help me write up that part of the report she gave me some articles from the Maico Audiological Series. The articles were on some things called *immittance* and *reactance*, and *impedance*. She advised me to "Just read these articles and see what you can do with it." Let me just say that the articles did not provide a cookbook explanation of how to administer and interpret tympanometry. It was a struggle to get through the articles but I read them and made an attempt to write the report. I wish I had a copy of what I wrote now, because I am positive that my report was hilarious to her, though she was kind enough to never let on. Nevertheless, I really liked that she had such high expectations of me. It felt to me that this was what a college education means. Somewhere during the course of that year I remember commenting to her that though I had made good grades I didn't think I had learned very much that quarter. Her response was that I can get whatever education I

want, it just depends on what I put into it. That comment has stayed with me to this day.

After Robyn left South Alabama to go where my sister said was “up north, to Memphis” I didn’t see her for a few years until, at Robyn’s encouragement, I went to Memphis for graduate school. She was still the best teacher I’d ever had. As a graduate student I came to realize that Robyn consistently offered the same encouragement and excellence to all her students. Her students responded in kind, always working their hardest to do their best in her courses. I also want to go on record that I forgive her for giving me a B in Hearing Science.

A couple of years after I graduated, and despite my B in Hearing Science, Robyn offered me a job on her new research grant. I jumped at the chance. It never occurred to me that my decision to work with her would have had such a profound impact on my career. At the time I didn’t know that Robyn Cox was going to be **Robyn Cox**. I did know that my new job was going to be fun. And fun it was. The thing was, though we worked hard, we laughed just as hard, and we laughed a lot. Robyn has a terrific belly laugh and is always ready to use it. It felt super whenever I was able to do or say something that would provoke that laugh. In the 20 plus years we did research I never thought of it as work.

I learned so much when I worked with her. Even though I learned a lot of facts, the most important lessons were less about the facts and more about process. It was an inspiration to watch her problem-solve and test research theories. I’ve watched her develop ingenious and innovative methods to evaluate new hearing aid technology or filter acoustic signals. It was by watching her that I learned how to be systematic and thorough as I approached technical problems with instrumentation. I learned that her systematic/thorough approach was vastly superior to my innate randomly-trying-things-without-writing-anything-down strategy. Today when someone tells me that I’m organized, I think, “No, Robyn is organized, I’m a copycat.” She taught me patience, not only with myself, but with co-workers. I was not so gifted in the Gracious and Considerate department, but I tried to learn by her example. Robyn never compromised research principals. She established a work environment for students and staff alike that encouraged excellence, not only in work product, but in work *ethic*. She brings out the best in most everyone who works with her.

I know that many of you are aware of Robyn’s research accomplishments. Over the years she has received many awards and honours, all of which are well deserved. I don’t know if I could actually tell you all of them because she rarely mentions them. Besides, though those awards may reflect elements of her body of work, I don’t think it could completely represent the value of the contributions that she has brought to this field.

Over the course of the years Robyn went from being my teacher, my advisor, and my boss to being my friend. We have gone through a lot over the years; there have been more good times than bad. We’ve each experienced births, deaths, and illnesses in our families. Her friendship is something I will always value and feel lucky to have. As a professional I feel as if her retirement will be a loss to the profession, and I am sad about that. But as her friend I hope that this next phase of her life is healthy and as fully successful as the past 40 years have been.