"I'm looking for Dr. Gardner," Ellen said to the distinctly rumpled back of a young man bending over getting something out of a file cabinet. He stood up, turned around, and said "I'm Dr. Gardner." The messy-haired man was Howard (some things never change).

It was the summer of 1973 and two years after receiving his doctorate in developmental psychology at Harvard, Howard was establishing himself as co-director of Project Zero, a research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education devoted to the study of arts and cognition. Ellen thought she was on her way to graduate school in clinical psychology — after majoring in literature at Radcliffe College and then studying painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston — when a notice at the Harvard employment office caught her attention. It described a research assistantship in the "psychology of art" with Howard Gardner at Harvard Project Zero. She had only the vaguest idea what the psychology of art was and had never heard of Howard Gardner, but she did know that art and psychology were her two interests, so she submitted her CV.

Expecting an eminent professor, she was taken aback to learn that the rumpled kid was Dr. Gardner. Ellen recalls telling Howard during the interview about her undergraduate thesis on metaphor in Yeats. Since Howard had recently received NSF funding to study metaphor in child language, his eyes lit up and Ellen knew she had the job. But there was a hitch: Howard insisted that she make a two-year commitment. Out of the question, she thought. She was four years out of college and felt it was high time to go to graduate school, so she turned down the job. Thinking about it later, however, she realized that, with only one college psychology course, two years of research at Project Zero just might improve her chances of admission to graduate school in clinical psychology. So she relented, signed on for two years, and, unbeknownst to either, a far longer commitment had begun.

On Ellen's first day at work, Howard handed her a box of data — interviews with children about their conceptions of the arts — and asked her to make sense of it. (This is Howard's theory of mentoring in action). Soon afterward Ellen and Howard had their first jointly authored paper, a Piaget-style analysis of clinical interviews appropriately entitled "Children's Conceptions of the Arts." Then they designed a study of children's understanding of metaphor together, resulting in a far more influential paper, "The Development of Metaphoric Understanding." By this time, Ellen had given up her desire to become a clinician, realizing that she was cut out for the developmental psychology of the arts.

Two years and quite a few collaborations later, Ellen went to graduate school in developmental psychology at Harvard, keeping one foot in Project Zero, with which she remains affiliated. Her advisor in graduate school was Roger Brown, who also had been Howard's advisor. Howard worked with Roger on studies of children's perceptions of painting.

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DYNAMIC DUOS

Step aside, Survivor. Time's up, 24. Get lost, Lost. This season's hottest reality series is right here in the Observer!

Okay, now that we have your attention: the truth is, we invited a number of distinguished couples to co-author a memoir about their lives together — anything from how they met, to other major personal and career milestones, to how they juggle careers and home. Their articles will appear as a series in the Observer over the next several months. In generously sharing their lives with us, they provide a fascinating glimpse into the human side of science and a record of the events that shaped some of the most productive and influential careers in our field.
styles; Ellen worked with him on the earliest emergence of intentional metaphor in child language, analyzing the speech of Roger's famed subject, Adam.

After Ellen finished graduate school, Howard encouraged her to stay at Project Zero and live on grants, just as he was doing. But Ellen opted for the security of a tenure-track position and the independence of a separate institution. In 1978, she took a position in the psychology department of Boston College where she has been ever since. Howard remained as a grant-supported research psychologist at Harvard and at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center until 1986, when he became a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. As of this writing, Howard has been at Harvard for 45 years, Ellen for 38 (she arrived as an undergraduate in 1965, and three years later she returned to Harvard when she joined Project Zero).

In 1982 they were married. Howard had three children from his first marriage, and a fourth child entered the family when they adopted Benjamin from Taiwan in 1986. Their family grew again when Ben, after a decade of pleading, talked his parents into getting a large shedding golden retriever. The extended family grew yet again in 2006 when Howard's oldest son and his wife had Oscar Bernard, the first grandchild.

Howard and Ellen remained professional collaborators for a number of years. They co-authored numerous papers and were co-PIs on several grants. Because Howard and Ellen shared a work ethic, interests, and writing styles, the collaborations were surprisingly seamless. That said, Ellen focused more on analysis, Howard on synthesis. For example, in their studies of metaphor and irony, Ellen dissected the processes involved in each form of understanding, while Howard pondered the relationships among various forms of figurative language.

By the middle 1980s, their intellectual paths began to diverge. Howard ventured into educational issues and, ultimately, into studies of professional ethics, while Ellen remained in the experimental psychology fold. But even when their work took different directions, they always read and still do read each other's work, and are often each other's harshest critics.

Ellen and Howard’s professional and marital success is probably due in part to the great many things they have in common. They both went to Harvard for undergraduate and graduate study and both worked with Roger Brown. Both had a strong interest in the arts and wanted to study how psychology could illuminate the arts. Both were taken with the work of Nelson Goodman, the founder of Project Zero, and Rudolf Arnheim, an inspiring mentor to both. They also shared a common heritage: Howard's parents were Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany; Ellen's father was a Jewish refugee from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. They were both eldest children (Howard had an older brother who died in a freak accident before Howard was born) and both had a younger sister. Both are inveterate readers and eager writers. They find the same things funny.

But there were also striking differences and some ironies. Howard is color blind and lacks depth perception due to a "lazy eye" (he is a bit cross-eyed), yet he chose to write his dissertation on children’s perception of style in painting. His favorite 20th century artist is the color field painter Mark Rothko — and yet every morning Ellen has to tell Howard if his clothes match. Ellen is a little tone-deaf (she cannot carry a tune), yet is studying the effect of music training on children's brain and cognitive development.

Someone once said to Howard that it must be so interesting for their son Ben to listen to dinner table conversations between his two parents who study intriguing topics like intelligence, giftedness, creativity, and imagination. "Right," he responded, "The typical dinner table conversation: 'I'm exhausted.' 'You have no idea what kind of day I had.' 'How come there is no food in the house?' 'Wasn't it your turn to get the groceries?' 'I don't care what you say, it's time to send this paper out.'"

PRESIDENTIAL from Page 5

observed the green group's better discrimination interpreted
the other study's lack of a between-group difference to the
green group also having "frontal-executive impairment."

So, we have a group of individuals whose more factual
descriptions of a meaningless picture were interpreted as
insignificant and talkative. We have a group whose
more accurate tactile matching was interpreted as sensory
prediction deficits. And we have a group whose heightened
memory discrimination in one study was interpreted as the
result of an as-yet unknown pathology, and whose equivalent
performance in another study was interpreted as frontal
executive impairment.

Confused? If I told you that the group interpreted as
providing insignificant and talkative descriptions comprised
"normal females," the group interpreted as unable to predict

the sensory consequences of their actions comprised persons
diagnosed with schizophrenia, and the group interpreted as
having aberrant mental representations and frontal executive
impairment comprised persons diagnosed with autism, would
it help? It shouldn't.

Maggio (1991) recommends that we test our writing
for bias by substituting our own group for the group we are
discussing. If we feel offended, then our writing is biased. I
recommend that we test our interpretations for bias by peeling
off the labels, as I've done here. If our interpretations make
little sense, then our science is biased. ♦

References