

# A Tale of Two Night Owls

Morton Ann Gernsbacher & H. Hill Goldsmith

Often people assume we must have known each other from childhood. After all, how many psychological scientists grew up in the northeast corner of Texas in the '50's and '60s? Our hometowns are less than 100 miles apart, which by Texas geographical standards is right around the corner. In some ways, we were similar kids — we both applied the Dewey Decimal System to our family's home libraries, we both were inveterate night owls, and we both attended Texas state universities (with Morton majoring in English literature and Hill majoring in microbiology). Despite these childhood similarities, it took two and a half decades of life (for Morton) and three (for Hill) before we met.

Our nocturnal proclivities were what put us in the same room in 1981. The early 80s: the age of Radio Shack TRS-80 microcomputers, daisy wheel printers, TICO text editors, PDP-10s, the ARPANET, and — most relevant — cheaper mainframe computer time after midnight. Thus, supporting social psychological research, our romantic attraction was born of proximity during the wee hours of the morning in the computer terminal room of the old psychology building at the University of Texas at Austin. Two years later, in a 10-day period, Morton defended her dissertation, we married, and we packed up a three-bedroom, two-bathroom townhouse and headed out of town.

Like many academic couples, the stages of our lives have been defined by our geographical moves, which have been directed by the academic marketplace. Our first relocation was to idyllic Eugene, Oregon, in 1983. The move itself was not so idyllic: We have flashbulb memories of driving a big rental truck through rain pelted Oregon forests along steep, narrow logging roads as timber-loaded trucks whizzed by us at breakneck speeds. Morton (normally content to ride

shot-gun) can verify that it was indeed Brady's "passive" monkeys who developed more ulcers. Yet, once we arrived safely at the University of Oregon, we found a gracious and comfortable home, both personally and professionally. What took 18 months to resolve, however, was getting Hill an official, tenure track position at Oregon. In the meantime, he remained an assistant professor in Austin, providing us with a 1,500-mile commute. In retrospect, we were lucky that it worked out so quickly; those were the days before spousal hiring programs.

Our next move took us to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1992. By then, we had made our marks in the field and the challenge of the "two-body problem" had lessened. Although Morton had scouted out the environment during a Halloween visit in which she met former Chancellor Donna Shalala (dressed as a mouse, with the system-wide president dressed as a cat), it was Hill who influenced the final decision, telling Morton that at least Wisconsin was warmer than his PhD alma mater state of Minnesota ("I hear in Wisconsin that they don't even plug their cars in at night").

At the University of Wisconsin, we have fallen into different, but complementary, academic roles. In short, Hill tends to be "Mr. Inside-the-Department" while Morton is

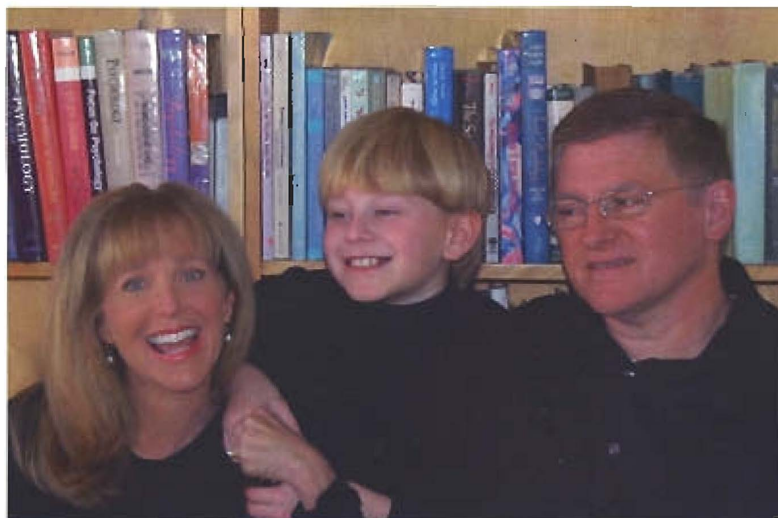
## DYNAMIC DUOS

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.

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Morton Ann Gernsbacher, Hill Goldsmith, and their son, Drew Morton Goldsmith.

“Ms. Outside.” Hill found a niche in the department chair role for a few years, and he continues to be closely involved in departmental business. Morton seems to have served on every committee the college and university has constructed, some of them twice, and she stays busy with national organizations. Other than service to NIH, Hill tends to stay closer to home.

Do we conduct research together? For years it was an unlikely prospect. Morton, trained as a cognitive scientist, views

the 2 x 2 factorial design as the incarnation of pristine elegance. Hill, a developmental behavioral geneticist, favors seemingly unending longitudinal twin projects with a slew of variables. We had starts and fits at collaboration, such as that classic publication, “Do readers mentally represent characters’ emotional states?” but none of the efforts were earth-shattering. Then, after more than a dozen years of marriage, at age 40 (Morton) and 46 (Hill), we began the most wonderful collaboration of our life; our son Drew was born in 1996. We knew that our lives would change, but we never imagined that Drew would lead us to be research collaborators — and that he would choose the topic: wondrous autistics, like himself.

As we write this essay, Morton and Hill hold a few grants together to study autism, Morton has published an article about Drew, and Drew seems to have mapped out a full research agenda for all three of us. Among the many attributes for which Drew manifests hybrid vigor is his nocturnal penchant, but we don’t harbor any suspicion that he will make a career in psychological science. A few years ago, as a seven-year-old, Drew typed, in response to a family friend asking whether he aspired to be an academic: “No way. The hours are long, and the pay is lousy.” ♦