

Reflections on Carlos Alvarado: Joyous Friend, Master Colleague, and the Early Years at JFKU¹

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Context: The Parapsychology Program at JFKU

Carlos and I first met in 1978 in the new Department of Consciousness Studies at John F. Kennedy University (JFKU), Orinda, California, USA, located in the Bay area of San Francisco. The department offered a Master of Science (M. S.) degree in the Psychology of Consciousness, or, as alternatively called, “Parapsychology,” developed and subsidized through the Parapsychology Foundation (New York, NY). This was a very dynamic and rigorous masters level graduate training program in quantitative and qualitative research in parapsychology and psychical research, which was organized, led, and taught by the well-known psychologist and parapsychologist, Dr. John Palmer, one of the major figures in the field then and now.³

Carlos and I were also privileged to take courses in the program by a host of the most important parapsychologists at that time. Our contact with these major researchers led to Carlos’ and my future studies and work in the field. Such visiting faculty offering several of our critical courses in addition to those Dr. John Palmer taught, included, for example, Dr. Bob Morris (University of Edinburgh, where Carlos later obtained his Ph. D. under Morris); Stanley Krippner (Saybrook), whose special interest in Brazilian mediumistic religions and phenomena coincided with my own; Dr. Charles Tart (University of California, Davis); and Gertrude

1 A brief excerpt of this paper was published in Spanish (*E-Boletín Psi*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September, 2021).

2 **Patric Giesler** was born and raised in Chicago. He double-majored in Psychology and Anthropology at Oberlin College, and then devoted three years to development projects in Bahia, Brazil. There he acquired his life-long interest in Brazil’s mediumistic religions and soon after obtained an M.S. in Parapsychology, John F. Kennedy University. After teaching in the program (1981–1983), he worked on his psi research at JB Rhine’s lab (FRNM) and Ian Stevenson’s division at the University of Virginia. From Brandeis University, Patric obtained his M.A and Ph.D. in Anthropology, and for 20 years served as professor of Anthropology at Gustavus Adolphus College.

3 See Duggan, M. (2019). John Palmer. *Psi Encyclopedia*. The Society for Psychical Research. <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/john-palmer>

Schmeidler (City University of New York). There were also workshops and seminars by researchers from J. B. Rhine's famous psi lab at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man (FRNM), Dr. Ian Stevenson's research division at the University of Virginia (where both Carlos [primarily] and I [secondarily] later worked), and influential independent researchers and writers, such as D. Scott Rogo (who wrote extensively about the history of psychical research, Carlos' main interest).

Carlos and I also benefitted from our cadre of superb graduate students in our group, several of whom continued to contribute to the field after JFKU, publishing in the psi journals and presenting at conferences of the Parapsychology Association (PA), Society for Psychical Research (SPR), Society for Scientific Explorations (SSE), and the Parapsychological Foundation (PF). Several of us received grants from the PF for our Masters research projects (as I did for my masters psi studies in Brazil and Carlos for his masters historical research).



Figure 1: From left to right: Carlos Alvarado, at 24–25 years of age, and three fellow graduate students. I, Patric Giesler, am on the right (with a beard for the first and only time in my life!) and next to me is our good friend, David Hess. Years later, after JFKU, Carlos went on to an M.A. in History and a Ph.D. in Psychology, as I mentioned, while both David and I went on to Ph.D.s in Anthropology and taught in mainstream universities in the U.S. (photo at JFKU, 1978–1980).

(Author's private collection)



Figure 2: In the back row, from left to right, our professor, Dr. John Palmer. Keith “Blue” Harary is in the middle, and Carlos Alvarado on the far right. “Blue” was not a student in our group, but took courses in the department and was a very significant subject in OBE experiments conducted by Dr. Bob Morris and others. OBEs were a major subject of Carlos’ research and scholarship later on, and thus, Blue’s unusual OBE abilities were of great interest to him. Then, in the bottom row, from left to right, our fellow graduate students, notably Carolyn Irwin on the left and Diane Murray, third from the left.

When John Palmer left JFKU to return to work at the Rhine’s lab at FRNM, he left the Masters in Parapsychology program at JFKU for Carolyn Irwin and me to continue (1981–1983). Carolyn taught the quantitative side (experimental) and I taught the qualitative side (spontaneous case research, field studies, surveys). Carlos moved on to a new position with Dr. Ian Stevenson at his University of Virginia division, which focused on qualitative psychical research. (JFKU, 1979–1980). (Author’s private collection)

Carlos: Joyous Friend and Master Colleague

When I first met Carlos at JFKU, we immediately hit it off and at many levels. The latin connection came first, as he was Puerto Rican and I was a “re-born” Brazil lover, having spent years working and living in Brazil, was fluent in the language and culture, and enamored with its

diverse forms of Spiritualism and African, Amerindian, and European Folk-Catholic derived mediumistic religions. But there was much more to the connection I felt with Carlos, as I am sure everyone who had ever met Carlos would have felt. Reflecting on that “connection,” what comes to my mind are Carlos’ many positive traits, encapsulated for me by his *joyous demeanor* and his service to all of us and our community as a *master colleague* (through his encyclopedic knowledge of psychical research and tireless, selfless, desire and effort to help others). These positive traits stuck with me throughout the two years with Carlos at JFKU, when I saw and interacted with him almost daily, and throughout our various academic encounters over the 40 years since we finished with JFKU. Let me share a few of my experiences with Carlos that continually reinforced my impression of him as my joyous friend and a master colleague.

Carlos’ Joyous Demeanor

To me, Carlos was what I would have to call a joyous human being. He was “joyous” in the sense that he always brought joy and a certain excitement and genuine interest to an encounter or interaction. In part, he did this through his spectacular sense of humor, his fun-loving spirit, and a special quality in his personality that always exuded camaraderie when we would meet. One felt immediately at ease and at home with Carlos, and for me, it was like meeting an old “camrade” or “brother” you haven’t seen in a while. You could experience this in many venues or situations, and clearly when all of us graduate students gathered for a beer and to discuss psi and also have fun with all of the amazing accounts of potentially paranormal experiences we were studying, which many of us also could relate in our own lives (Fig. 3).

Part of Carlos’ “joyous” side was often especially ignited by the excitement and fun of surprises, which seemed to also be at the heart of his reaction to the paranormal – a surprise from expected “normal” events. At one point, I came up with the idea to surprise one of our fellow students on her birthday. For the surprise, one of us made up an excuse to go to the target person’s house to study or to work on a project. But in reality, it was an excuse to surprise the person with all 20 or so of us grad students and Dr. Palmer showing up and screaming, “SURPRISE!” followed then by a spontaneous gathering with gifts we all brought along. We eventually did this many times, always tricking the beneficiary so she or he would not suspect. In the following three cases of such surprises (Fig. 4–7) you can see the joy in Carlos’ face, engaging with everyone and intrigued by that strange reality-shifting state of mind of the person that is surprised. Carlos was about as engaged and joyous as I ever saw him!

Figure 3: Carlos in the back, smiling ear to ear. Next to him is Frances, a fellow Puerto Rican, a friend and colleague in psychology, who also came for the graduate program in parapsychology. And the others are a few of the 20 graduate students in our group (JFKU, 1978–80).

(Author's private collection)



Figure 4: Surprising fellow graduate student, Carolyn Irwin. Right side: Loyd Auerbach at the door, Diane Murray, and Dr. John Palmer in the back. Left side: David Hess at the door. Carlos is behind David, out of view here, but glued to the door! (See photo on the right). Frances is in the lower left. (Loyd Auerbach, David Hess, and I are among several of Carlos' cronies in our student group who have been ongoing contributors to the field, and all of us having benefitted in those contributions from our relationship with Carlos.)

Figure 5: Carlos now in the upper left behind David Hess at the doorway. Loyd Auerbach and Dr. John Palmer on the right (JFKU, 1978–1980). (Author's private collection)

The following photos are from a surprise visit with gifts for fellow graduate student, Diane Murray, and you can see Carlos' excitement and engagement once we had gathered in her apartment and she opened the gifts.



Figure 6: Surprising Diane Murray. From the left to right: Carlos, John Palmer, Diane, David Hess.

Figure 7: Surprising Diane Murray. From left to right: Carolyn Irwin (and son), Dr. John Palmer, Carlos, who as you can see is well engaged and loving every second of it, and David Hess (JFKU, 1979–80). (Author's private collection)



Figure 8: Diane and Frances in the front and other graduate students on the couch, and John Palmer and Carlos on the right. Note again how engaged, interested, excited Carlos is (JFKU 1978–1980).

(Author's private collection)

Master Colleague

In addition to Carlos' "joyous demeanor," Carlos had two other striking and endearing traits that struck me almost immediately when I met him in 1978 and which contributed to that feeling of "connection" I felt with Carlos. These were his encyclopedic knowledge and his tireless desire to help others with their research and careers, traits which made him for me and so many others a true "Master Colleague."

Within minutes in a conversation with Carlos, one was bound to quickly become stunned by Carlos' unbelievable encyclopedic knowledge, particularly of the historical details of psychical research and parapsychology. He brought that tremendous knowledge to bear in his prolific scholarly production in so many professional psi journals, encyclopedic entries, books and chapters, and conference presentations and through his own erudite historical blog and countless other venues in cognate fields. Moreover, he also applied that knowledge in his tireless and selfless efforts to help others with their research projects and with getting them connected to the field or becoming established in psi research. Certainly, I cannot forget the countless

times over the years that Carlos would give me several references off the top of his head for some theoretical model I wanted to pursue or Spiritualist mediumistic research I wanted more details on. And as for helping me in my own career, I cannot forget that it was Carlos that invited me to join him at Ian Stevenson's research center in the University of Virginia, his "Division of Personality Studies" (later changed to "Division of Perceptual Studies"), 1985–1986. Carlos had been doing research there since leaving JFKU in 1981/82. In that way, I had a couple of years under Ian Stevenson's guidance and of course benefitted innumerable times when Carlos applied his vast knowledge of the literature to any of my research questions while I worked with him at the Division.

Finally, my experience of all of these traits in Carlos persisted throughout the decades since JFKU and the days at the Division, as when we would meet at PA and other conferences where we presented papers and talked about each other's research, always with a certain high level of camaraderie and joyousness, as exemplified in the following photos of us at such meetings (Figures 9–12).



Figure 9: One of the PA conferences we attended together early on, 1983–1985. Most likely this one was from the PA at Tufts University, Boston, 1985. (Author's private collection)



Figure 10: Carlos is seen here in a session of the 2011 PA in Curitiba, Brazil, that I attended. It was a masterful presentation and was wonderful for me to hear, it being 31 years since our JFKU days! (PA, Curitiba, Brazil, 2011).

(Author's private collection)



Figure 11: Carlos and I toasting at our meeting once again after many years of relatively little contact. I had had to focus on my anthropology research during the previous decade. Fortunately, I was in Brazil doing that research at the time of the conference, so I could attend, and was recruited at the meeting to give an award and chair a session (PA, Curitiba, Brazil 2011).

(Author's private collection)



Figure 12: Carlos and I also had the opportunity to re-unite with our old professor from JFKU, Dr. John Palmer, now 31 years later. That is John next to Carlos, and next to me is the psychiatrist, Dr. Alexander Moreira-Almeida, a new Brazilian friend and colleague. We had met at a previous PA at Winchester, UK 2008. He told me how much Carlos had helped him with many of his papers on psychical research and parapsychology and even in certain areas of psychiatry. He emphasized that he couldn't have done them without Carlos, the Master Colleague! (PA Curitiba, Brazil 2011)
(Author's private collection)

Confirmed over and over again during the 43 years since we first met at JFKU, Carlos Alvarado was indeed a truly "joyous friend and master colleague," one who, needless to say, will always be sorely missed!