

Vicki Bier: The next panelist is Reza Ghodssi, who was actually a student of Denice's here at Wisconsin during his education, and mentored by her. Also a very, very close personal friend of hers from then on throughout the rest of her life, and is currently an associate professor in the department of Electrical Engineering at University of Maryland.

Reza Ghodssi: Denice was my former thesis advisor, but she was also my closest friend in life. So I'm concentrating today on what she did for me as a mentor. One year has passed since that shocking Saturday morning of June 24, 2006. On Sunday June 24th, 2007 I was flying home from overseas. I spent the entire flight remembering and reviewing everything that I've experienced in the past twelve months. One year is a long time, and particularly this one felt like a decade. There were many moments that I tried to understand your permanent absence, what happened, and what I could have done to prevent it. But I have not yet come up with a logical answer. And while remembering your tender loving care, friendship, leadership, teaching, insightfulness, hopefulness, fearlessness, understanding, and grace, there has always been one thing that lights up my heart even more. And that is simply how fortunate I am to have had you in my life as my mentor.

I probably can take a very motivating and even entertaining look on all the adventures we shared in the eighteen years that we knew each other. I would describe all the lessons that you taught me, directly and indirectly, on how to become an independent educator and researcher, and at the same time, benefit my community as much as possible. But that was only on the career front. More important, you taught me how to be truthful to myself, even in the most competitive and official setting. Considering my own background I view myself as a miracle product of a highly patient, creative, and determined mentor of you. While my first public speaking experience was in front of a handful of kindergarteners, you were there with me to talk about how exciting electronic chips are. You helped me overcome my shyness by letting those kids ask me the spontaneous and challenging questions that even God would not have answers for. On another occasion, as you were giving your talk to a bunch of first graders, I was literally buried by them in the middle of the room while they were trying to get their hands on these tiny electronic chips. Man, you were so wonderfully eager to help those kids learn, and to make me realize what a difference I could make in their lives, and yet have fun in the process.

When that colleague of yours – we used to call him "God" – literally threw my homework at me in front of the whole class simply because I was part of your group, or shall we say, "army," you encouraged me to stand up for myself, and never let anyone treat me that way. You made sure that an official complaint was made, even if it got buried in the queue. Who would ever forget the day that you asked me – yes, me – the senior undergraduate researcher in your group, "Mr. Nobody," to attend and present at a program review meeting in industry. You made sure everyone understood the benefit of having students involved in the process, even at the very very edge, every stage. That was the time I

had that bloody athlete's foot that had a unique odor, which really made the meeting a memorable one. *[Laughter]* As always, you were gracious and didn't say anything. You must admit I had had brought a little something to your life. Remember the time, way back, I arrived in the morning, greeted you, "Good morning Professor Denton!" and added, "Would you like a personal rooster for the summer?" One more time, "Would you like a personal rooster for the summer?" I repeated. "Would that be personnel roster?" *[laughter]* she said, and we laughed for a good ten minutes. That time you told everyone, eventually I got it. Then I decided to stay at UW for graduate school. You encouraged me and got me involved in one of the most exciting research projects in your group. One day you drove me yourself to Chicago to give my first ever conference presentation. Even though I had practiced, my blood pressure was down like a dead person's, I was pale, and I of course had forgotten all my lines minutes before the talk. But you were there, sitting in the back, giving me the moral support I needed, and waving your hands every once in a while to remind me to move away from the projector so people could see what I talking about. *[Laughter]*

At the end of my first year of graduate school, I started becoming quite depressed myself. This caught you by surprise. I had everything to be proud of and happy about, and yet no one was as miserable as I was. I finally came to you, my source. You encouraged me to go visit my folks back home, and I did go back after nine years away. Unfortunately I was in such bad shape that that visit didn't help. When things got even worse you put me in contact with a psychologist on campus. It took me almost a year to recover. You were patient with me all along and never lost confidence in me. Things eventually got better. Later on, when I told you I had decided to go to MIT after my graduation to work with your own former advisor, you only smiled and kind of rolled your eyes. You left it up to me to make my own decision. However, during my three years in Cambridge you never missed your periodic phone calls to me. And sometimes you visited me there. Once we went to Martha's Vineyard. We rented a jeep and drove around all day singing Motown hits. This was especially disturbing to a group of people trying to meditate on the beach.

Becoming a junior faculty member at Maryland and moving to Washington, D.C. area was a double treat for me. Now I was able to see you every time you visited NSF or another government agency. You continued being my mentor, now at a different level, now to be a moral, effective faculty member, and reminded me about what mattered most. Every award and grant that I got, you were the first to know, and vice-versa. Your phone calls and visits kept me going and gave me the perspective I needed. You showed me again and again that a chain of mentoring never stops, and only becomes more significant and effective as we go forward in life.

The last time I saw you it was at the National Gallery of Art in D.C. It was one of the coldest and the snowiest days ever in Washington. The Monet exhibit – a demonstration of the beauty that the human

mind is capable of – put us both in great spirits. I think of that, now, because you had that unique and beautiful ability to empower people to do their best. And I will never forget that. Thank you.

[Applause]