

Plans for conference presentation

A Scholar Cut Down. A Son Lost.

July 22, 2024

Niagara Conference on Workplace Mobbing

We start with the end.

On April 2, 2023, Joel Inbody was fatally and tragically shot by Border Patrol Agents in the desert near Las Cruces, New Mexico. At 8:37 pm. on April 2, having never crossed or attempted to cross the border, Joel circumvented the cones of a security checkpoint on Interstate Highway 10, thirty miles inside the US border. He was upset and confused. Multiple agents began to follow him. He drove 40 miles per hour, in distress, alone and afraid, trying to find a way, any way, not to have to stop and interact with them. They boxed him in with three vehicles. Guns drawn, agents surrounded his car and shouted profanity at him. They threatened him. They let him drive away only to disable his car with spike strips on the dirt road in front of him. When the car wouldn't move any farther, he got out and walked away. He was unarmed. He had done nothing wrong but avoid a checkpoint. They were never in any danger. But they fatally shot him at 10:01 pm.

As Ken Westhues wrote in the preface to Joels' book, it was a "coterie of half a dozen ill-trained, trigger-happy border patrol officers" that failed to recognize Joel's emotional distress and took Joels' life that night.

That was the second mobbing Joel experienced.

I'm Kimberly Lewis. I'm Joel's mom and I'm here to carry on Joel's work and speak for him. He would have been proud to stand here and present his work, the manuscript he wrote that tells the story of the academic mobbing he underwent at the University of Massachusetts as a PhD student. But instead, I will tell you that story because he can no longer speak for himself. His traumatic experiences at UMass Amherst, the first mobbing, the one he wrote about, was a primary cause of his mental state that night on Highway 10, thirty miles inside the US border when the second mob took his life. We will come back briefly to that story again at the end.

Before his interest in sociology began

In 2009 when Joel was graduating high school, he ran for school board. In an interview for the local paper, he talked about his plans to study pre-law at Geneseo and pursue a career in politics with his sites set on being a senator.

As a high school student, he worked at McDonald's and was involved in boy scouts, wrestling, track and field, chorus, band and drama. He had many friends, although he was a non-conformist. Growing up in our household he had practiced a Christian faith with us, attending church and youth group, and studying the Bible. But he turned away from the things he'd been taught because he could not empirically understand them.

Two quotes from the legacy pages of reflections after his death, stand out about him at this time. John Weaver one of Joel's high school teachers, wrote that "Possessing a wealth of intellectual curiosity, Joel added an essential element to my high school English classroom. His presence stoked his peers to explore profound insights and worthy considerations. Joel pushed his talents beyond his comfort zone. He innately realized he had much to offer his piece of the world, and he wasted little time proving his mettle."

Paul Payette, one of his youth group leaders wrote, "Thank you for not taking the world at face value or for granted. Thank you for always exploring, inquiring, and wanting ... no needing ... to know why and how. Thank you for your precision and insistence that details matter. Thank you for your fortitude and courage – for standing up for what you believed, even when (not if) it put you out on the end of a bough by yourself. Thank you for being authentic. Sometimes at a cost. Thank you for being patient and forgiving, especially in the midst of misunderstanding. Thank you for being kind, compassionate and gentle."

Undergrad at Geneseo

As a student at Geneseo College Joel began to pursue a degree in Political Science, with a pre-law focus. But his interests expanded far beyond his major. He spent hours hunting for and studying fossils. He led an organization called the Secular Students Association which ran interfaith

dialogs between atheists and religious groups. He had left his Christian faith behind, but his interest in religion, as a construct, grew. He found his love of the study of sociology and a mentor in his professor Steve Derne. Derne encouraged Joel's interest and research and soon Joel was traveling to Santa Fe, New Mexico, as a twenty one year old undergraduate student presenting at his first national academic conference. He presented a paper entitled, "Somatic Experiences and the Source of Religious Conviction" at the Biannual Meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion" on May 1, 2011.

During his undergraduate studies he was also diagnosed with a temporal lobe partial seizure disorder. He began taking Lamictal and the symptoms disappeared.

As he approached graduation, he began applying to graduate schools with plans to study sociology and pursue becoming a professor. He interviewed at Emory and although he did not get an offer there, he met another prospective graduate student who would become an important part of his life. He was offered partial funding at Chicago University and SUNY Stonybrook, but he did not want to go into debt to study, so he came home for a "gap" semester.

Graduate school at SUNY Buffalo

He began at University at Buffalo as a non-matriculated student of sociology in Jan of 2014. His academic work quickly showed the quality he could offer the program and he was accepted in the fall with full funding including a Presidential Fellowship rarely given to students studying at the master's level. Joel continued his interest in sociology of religion and studied both Pentecostal Christians and Jehovah Witnesses. He was published in the *Sociology of Religion* during his time at UB and found a mentor at UB as well, Professor Mike Farrell.

During Joel's second year in the program, a few important things happened.

His mentor retired.

He experienced the onset of new symptoms of the neurological disease, which led to a new diagnosis, bi-polar disorder. His doctor increased the

dosage of the medication he had already prescribed for the seizure disorder as it was effective for both.

Joel's relationship with the young woman he met at Emery continued and she came to Buffalo to live with him during his last semester. They applied to various PhD programs with hopes of studying together.

He graduated summa cum laude with his M.A. in Sociology in 2016 and moved to Soderlund, Massachusetts as a fully funded PhD student University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His long-time girlfriend moved to Boston to begin her PhD at Harvard, but they still planned for a life together.

UMASS Amherst: The beginning of the mobbing

In September of 2016 Joel was far from home and alone. He did not sync well with the first professor he worked with as a TA, and he struggled to find his place at UMass. By his second semester there, the longtime romantic relationship had crumbled under the weight of the distance and difficulty of both of them starting in new challenging competitive programs. He began to struggle with some bi-polar symptoms and was authentic in sharing that with a couple professors and colleagues. He sought help in the campus clinic and began to see a counselor regularly.

In April of 2018 Joel filed a grievance against a professor. It was the same professor he TA'd with during his first semester. And this action is the one that Joel identifies as the act that was a catalyst for the academic mobbing that quickly followed. In this stressful time, Joel became distant from family and struggled to stay connected to the few colleagues at UMass that were his friends.

Joel's manuscript: Framed around Tigrel and Kokalan

Joel had journaled regularly since middle school, and he kept detailed notes of his experiences. After leaving UMass, in an effort to heal and try to process what had happened to him, Joel found Kenneth Westhues's writing found a name for his experiences, "academic mobbing." He decided to write an account of it all so that he could "critically explore" it.

In his introduction he explained “I analyze content from numerous records (emails, police reports, notes, letters, blog posts, pictures) and rely on autoethnography to describe the mobbing that I lived through in Thompson Hall”

Joel wrote and framed his understanding of his experiences around the model created by Tigrel and Kokalan (2009) who identify five phases to an academic mobbing:

- (1) pre-mobbing conflict, stressors, and a critical incident
- (2) a targeted person is maligned, isolated, and manipulated
- (3) university administrators or management gets involved without full information, usually in favor of instigators
- (4) a targeted person is labeled innately problematic (e.g., hard to work with, mentally ill) and is reassigned or fired
- (5) a targeted person leaves the university as the mob continues to make problems for them

The Definition of Unethical: The Mobbing of a Graduate Student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (2016- 2019, Thompson Hall, Sociology Department)

Chapter 1: Academic mobbing in the literature

Joel’s review of available literature on mobbing to highlight their history, severity, and progression

Chapter 2: Before the mobbing

Joel describes the personal characteristics and interpersonal stressors which he believed made him vulnerable to mobbing.

Chapter 3: A first wave of harassment

This begins with a critical incident- the grievance he filed against a professor- and the first wave of harassment that followed, accusations that he was manic.

Chapter 4: A second wave of harassment

which was the false accusation that he sexually harassed a female undergraduate, at which point instigators began to involve high-ranking accomplices.

Chapter 5: A third wave of harassment

describes the false allegations that Joel owned a pistol and planned a shooting on campus.

Ch. 6: Parting shots, police surveillance, and a cover-up

that characterized the end of the mobbing as he left western Massachusetts and tried to move on with his life.

Conclusion:

contains his advice to future students who are facing academic mobbing and policy suggestions for states and academic departments that he believed could end mobbings in the United States.

Results and Context

He was placed on an enforced leave from his position as a TA.

He was brought up on Title IX charges.

He fought back showing their “evidence” to be part of a “set up” against him that did not hold up to scrutiny.

He was stalked and harassed by the university police.

He won the case and was cleared of all charges.

Then, his supervisor refused to give him a TA assignment saying “your services are no longer needed” and he banned him from the department building where the classes he was enrolled in for the next semester would be held.

He secured a small settlement with help from the TA union in exchange for withdrawing from the program.

And then, he was banned from campus.

Joel wrote:

“They overwhelmed me with lies, malicious gossip, bureaucratic tribunals, and by falsely reporting serious crimes. I deliberately asked that the settlement I received not include a silencing clause because I intended to draw attention to former colleagues’ duplicity and cruelty. They tried to frame me as a deranged school shooter. They called the university police and lied to them when I calmly questioned them about their actions. They cause me to suffer from PTSD which I struggled to cope with for several years, and nearly drove me to a suicide attempt. Their behavior is inexcusable. The instigators behaved with deliberate malice, as did the high-ranking university employees”

2020-2023

In January 2020 Joel was hospitalized for 27 days treated for a period of delusional psychosis directly related to the academic mobbing

Joel was released and began working as a security guard to pay for his room in a house he shared with strangers in Buffalo, and he reconnected with family.

Joel found the Edwin Mellen Press and began to work with Dr. Richardson who mentored him in completing the work that would have been his doctoral dissertation. In January 2022 the press published his book: ***The Praxis of Inequality: The Study of Three Ancient Agricultural Societies (Egypt, China, and Mesopotamia).***

He continued to write and revise his document about the academic mobbing at UMass. His academic research never ended, calling himself an independent scholar, he continued to revise his work on Jehovah Witnesses and submitted it for publication to numerous journals.

He developed his drawing talent and posted his art on a blog site he called “All Hail the Underdogs” housed on the website DeviantArt.com

He contracted with the Press to publish a book including biographies and his original artwork on men and women known as “heretics,” more of the underdogs.

He secured a position as a housing specialist for Belmont Housing Resources of WNY. In his legacy pages, colleagues described him as articulate, talented and kind. They told me stories at the wake of his friendship and support when they were going through struggles of their own. He became a paralegal working for the Center for Elder Law and Justice and later the Bernardi Law Firm.

And then once again, the end. In March of 2023, Joel went on a road trip across the country – up to Maine, down the coast to Florida, across the south west to Texas. At the end of March, he paid his car insurance and rent for April, indicating his intention to return home to his apartment in West Seneca when he finished his trip.

But on April 2, 2023, Joel Inbody was fatally and tragically shot by Border Patrol Agents in the desert near Las Cruces, Mexico.

Conclusion- Two mobbings:

Kenneth Westhues wrote “This book is about the mobbing Inbody underwent in 2018-2019 at the University of Massachusetts. It is the only mobbing he lived to write about. It harmed him occupationally, financially, socially and psychologically, but he lived to tell the tale.

The mobbing in Amherst was genteel, woke, postmodern, nonviolent, slow and steady. It was carried out by highly educated faculty and students in a university.

That academic mobbing helped set the stage for the second one, the one in the New Mexico desert. Here, too, individuals surrendered their individuality, formed themselves into a cohesive group, and acted collectively to get rid of Joel Inbody. Unlike the first mobbing, this one was crude, quick, extreme, violent, and lethal. It was carried out by ill-trained, trigger-happy border agents

This second mobbing was not unrelated to the first. Being forced out of a doctoral program in the field Inbody considered his vocation was traumatic. As he describes in his book, and as commonly occurs in academic mobbing, it meant a crisis in all aspects of his life: occupational, financial, familial, emotional, psychological. It was the cumulated crises in his life that led to his encounter with the border patrol officers in New Mexico.

I recently discovered WOLA, The Washington Office on Latin America a non-profit research and advocacy organization advancing human rights in the Americas. In April 2022, they launched [BorderOversight.org](https://borderoversight.org) where they maintain a database of troubling events that have occurred at the border since 2020.

" While there's much about the overall strategy we'd change, the agents themselves are often dedicated and honorable, and we hold in high esteem many whom we've met.

But there's a dark side. We also hear a lot that concerns us....Much of what we learn recalls behaviors and patterns we have seen elsewhere in our Latin America-based work, typical of powerful military and police forces in the region that have abused human rights with impunity. We hear about agents and officers misusing lethal force, carrying out dangerous vehicle pursuits, ... using abusive language, and much else.

When this behavior happens, public complaints often go nowhere, and an internal affairs and inspector-general apparatus issue few meaningful punishments. Though we believe the vast majority of Customs and Border Protection officers and Border Patrol agents are honorable and committed to their mission, we hear about them protecting their abusive colleagues, blocking oversight with a "wall of silence"—a phenomenon all too common in law enforcement agencies at all levels.

We keep hearing about these indicators of a troubled culture at CBP and Border Patrol. It's a scattered mass of troubling items, dispersed like puzzle pieces, and often forgotten."

Final slide

Joel Inbody

November 22, 1990 – April 3, 2023

A Scholar Cut Down

A Son Lost

To purchase Joel's book, contact the Edwin Melen press at

<https://mellenpress.com/>

To learn more about Joel's death, you can find a collection of links to the Border Patrol's "transparency" documents, and the investigative reports that were done by Buffalo WIVB News investigative reporters Luke Moretti and Dan Tevlock <https://www.kwesthues.com/Inbody240617.html>

I'm Kim Lewis. I'm his mom.