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A Small Unassuming Man Walked up to Me, Shook My Hand and Told Me, “I Really Enjoyed Your Paper”

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Remembering Erving Goffman

David Dickens:

A Small Unassuming Man Walked up to Me, Shook My Hand and Told Me, "I Really Enjoyed Your Paper"

Dr. David Dickens, Professor of Sociology at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, wrote this memoir at the invitation of Dmitri Shalin and gave his approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives.

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September 12, 2007

During my last year of graduate school, in 1977 or 1978, I presented a paper on phenomenological sociology at a conference in Boston. The session was chaired by Larry Wieder, a prominent ethnomethodologist. Once the presentations concluded, a small unassuming man walked up to me, shook my hand and told me "I really enjoyed your paper. It was very clear." I thanked him and he then turned toward Larry, whom he seemed to know, and said "Larry, I didn't understand a word you said." Wieder, being the kind fellow that he was, simply chuckled and said, "Well, Erving, I'm sorry to hear that." I still had no idea who the stranger was but, as he turned and walked away, Larry looked at me and said, "you should be very proud, that was Erving Goffman."