

Reflections on the Life and Legacy of Joseph Nicolosi, Sr.: An Interview with Linda Nicolosi

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Linda Nicolosi is the widow of Joseph Nicolosi, Sr. and served faithfully alongside him for 39 years of marriage before his untimely death in 2017. She is currently republishing all four of Dr. Nicolosi's books under her own imprint, Liberal Mind Publishers. The books are available through josephnicolosi.com, where many of her late husband's articles also remain available. In this interview, she shares her recollections of her husband, their involvement in the early years of NARTH (now the Alliance), and her observations about the current state of the mental health field for those providing care for persons with unwanted same-sex attractions.

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Linda, I want to thank you for consenting to this interview, which I'm sure the journal's readership will find enlightening. I want to start in the beginning. Could you tell us about your personal background (birthplace, childhood family, formative experiences as a youth, etc.)?

I was born in New York and grew up in a Christian family with traditional values. I was

educated at a private Christian girls' boarding school started by D. L. Moody, a well-known evangelist, who first opened the boarding school as a girls' seminary. Today, the school has become exactly the opposite—militantly pro-LGBT-agenda and anti-biblical.

During those years at the school in the early '60s, I got to see firsthand how the culture was changing. As a student, I was beginning to experience the pressure of political correctness and to feel constrained

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and angry that common sense views of the world were becoming unfashionable and verboten. I felt a sense of nostalgia, even then, that D. L. Moody's Christian vision was slipping away and that the people around me were simply not noticing or caring what was happening.

There is one incident that stays in my mind. I was a senior, soon to go off to college, and the school had invited Rev. William Sloan Coffin, a very popular minister, to give a speech to us girls. He told us that he believed the Bible didn't forbid unchastity for unmarried people, as long as they loved each other. The other girls swooned—here was this handsome minister encouraging us to do exactly what we wanted to do and giving us biblical justification!

I remember thinking at the time, "Something is wrong with this picture, when adult authority figures are not strengthening our self-control by their teaching and example, but instead are encouraging us to do what we want and to live as we want." That incident planted a seed in my mind that something was radically changing—not just among the younger generation, which is always, of course, a rebellious one—but among the adult authority figures who should be protecting us from our own passions. After all, I had grown up watching *The Mickey Mouse Club* and *Zorro* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* when I came home from school. It was a simple, sweet world where teachers could still get away with rapping your knuckles if you were disrespectful! And it was rapidly becoming something else.

How did you come to meet Joe? How did you come know he was "the one" for you?

We met at a psychology conference in Long Beach, CA, when I was starting out in a master's in psychology, a career which I later decided to abandon. I immediately appreciated Joe's intelligence, humor,

inquisitiveness, strong family values, and his iconoclastic nature. He was funny, irreverent and "out there." Yet he had a strong "center" and values that he did not compromise on, especially in terms of his sense of duty towards family.

What are your recollections about how Joe became interested in the psychological care of those with unwanted same-sex attractions? How did you feel about this as his wife?

At first I was not sure about accepting his view of the SSA issue, because I had been educated to see it from a liberal perspective. But even then, I had an uneasiness about what I was learning in school. Something about it didn't match up with reality, and I felt annoyed that I had to spout back the "right" philosophy to get an A from my psychology professors at Cal State Long Beach. I indeed got the A's, but I had to regurgitate their agenda. This was true in Gender Studies and Feminist Studies especially.

Joe got interested in the subject because he had several clients with SSA and he saw how closely they fit the classic family pattern, but because he hadn't been taught about the subject in grad school, he had to learn about it on his own. He became curious about why he hadn't been taught about the rich clinical observations in the psychodynamic literature and he began to suspect a politically motivated "forgetting" within his profession. How right he was!

How did NARTH get started? Many Alliance members know that NARTH was founded in 1992 by Benjamin Kaufman, Charles Socarides, and Joe, but among these three giants of free inquiry, who approached whom? How long did it take to birth the organization?

I believe it was Ben Kaufman who first approached Joe. Ben related how he had acted as a Good Samaritan in giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to an accident victim, but then when he wanted to know the man's HIV-status, so he could protect himself if necessary, the hospital refused to tell Ben because of the special privacy protections given to patients in response to lobbying efforts from the gay community. That was yet another incidence of common sense yielding to political correctness. Ben, Charles, and Joe knew they needed to rally the mental-health community to protect their rights to offer treatment, as the gay lobby's power grew and slowly began a professional and cultural stranglehold.

What were the organizations' main challenges during the early years?

Money—NARTH was broke. Joe, myself, and our son Joe Jr. folded and stuffed the NARTH Bulletins on our kitchen table. I wrote the articles. But we had a sense of mission that it had to be done.

You were very involved in NARTH's early years as well. Tell us a bit about your role in supporting Joe and the organization.

I had always wanted to do something of value in my life, something to promote the truth. Just "making a living" would have never satisfied that need. My mother's family had been missionaries and ministers, and I think their spirit came into my spirit and drove me to pursue this work. So, I did virtually all the writing and editing for NARTH.

I also read slews of gay publications and studied the professional literature on homosexuality so I would be educated on what I was doing. It quickly became apparent to me that homosexuality was not just something benign—i.e., a different way of loving—but that it had a very dark side that

was quite intrinsic to it. This was also true of lesbianism.

I saw that people caught up in homosexuality started out as innocent and blameless, but that a failure in same-sex attachment later formed their romantic and erotic attractions into something not natural to us as human beings. I am a great lover of nature. How could using the wrong body parts (oral and anal) be anything but a violation of human dignity? How could putting on a dildo and acting like a man with one's woman partner be a true and authentic form of loving? We all have a designed and created nature, and to live our lives most fully, we must confirm ourselves to it, instead of living out and celebrating our brokenness.

Because the world was losing its ability to perceive this truth, I felt driven to write about it and to help Joe in his work. He had a remarkable clinical astuteness, as well as great patience with people and empathy for them. Over and over he would tell me, "I love my work." Sometimes he would cry when he would tell me how some of his clients had been neglected and abused as children.

What are some of your more memorable experiences?

I worked extensively with Robert Spitzer to get the Spitzer study prepared for publication and published. That was considered a landmark study at the time, though Spitzer later became concerned that his interview subjects might not have all been frank with him, and, as he was under strong pressure from the gay community—which greatly disliked the results—Spitzer later asked the journal's editor to withdraw the study. The editor wisely refused to do that. I wrote an analysis of my time working with Spitzer, which was published at *The Bob Spitzer I Knew—Crisis Magazine* (<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2016/the-bob-spitzer-i-knew>). Spitzer, many people

like to forget, was the same person who was the driving force to remove homosexuality from the diagnostic manual, and also the person who told me, for publication, years afterward, “In homosexuality, something’s not working.”

Joe would also want me to mention a little “coup” I had while I was studying the professional journals for material for the NARTH Bulletin on homosexuality. I was the source of what *The National Psychologist* called a “public relations nightmare” for the American Psychological Association. Not a bad thing to be able to do!

I had alerted talk-show host Dr. Laura Schlesinger about an article published in an APA journal entitled, “A Meta-analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples.” After I exposed it, the study drew the attention of Congress, which called for an investigation.

The outrage focused on the authors’ conclusion, based on their analysis of child-molestation studies, that “the negative effects [of sexual abuse] were neither pervasive nor typically intense.” One of the study’s authors, Robert Bauserman, was openly associated with the pedophilia movement. As *The National Psychologist* reported, according to the study, sexual relationships between adults and children are not as harmful as once believed, and not all childhood victims of sexual abuse necessarily suffer mental illness as a result. . . . The uproar which followed could be seen in U.S. media and from Berlin to Bangkok. But poor Dr. Laura paid dearly for that uproar. The gay movement turned on her with a vengeance, and before long, her talk-show career was over.

Another thing I learned during my NARTH years was that there is a ripple effect in society when homosexuality goes from being compassionately tolerated—i.e., as an unfortunate situation for which we have sympathy and understanding—to being “celebrated” as a positive good.

As one example: same-sex attraction, particularly in men, threatens friendship—the natural and beautiful bond of camaraderie that should always be free of eroticism and even the suspicion of eroticism. Thus, SSA begins to break down the social order and push society into pansexuality. Any relationship, particularly a healthy, innocent mentorship, can now be suspected of being erotic, because sex now can “legitimately” occur between people of the same gender.

During my years with NARTH, I also came to a greater appreciation of why Jewish tradition has required separation and division—the separation of male from female, good from evil, sacred from profane, life from death. Without those fundamental separations, civilization begins a slow slide into barbarism. We see that today in society’s denial of gender differences, and in the sexualization of children who aren’t left alone by adults to be children, while adults themselves are acting like kids! I think of Sen. Elizabeth Warren telling a transgender child on TV that “if I get to be president, I’ll come and ask for your personal approval before I nominate an education secretary.” What happened to respect for the wisdom of adults? Not to mention, of course, that a nine-year-old boy can hardly be trusted to decide that he “is” a girl, and thus set himself on a lifelong course of sterility, surgical mangling of his body, and hormone treatments.

As my aged mother-in-law used to say, “It’s a crazy world.”

How did Joe’s Catholic faith influence his life’s work of helping men with unwanted same-sex attractions?

He saw the world as designed, and God—not man—was the designer. He knew we cannot escape our human natures, which are inevitably gendered.

I twice had the pleasure of having lunch with you and Joe at your home in SoCal. One of my main recollections of our time together was how the Joe at home was such a gentle soul, with a particular interest in painting and growing his garden. This was a different Joe than I had typically seen in his sometimes-outspoken public presentations and certainly unrecognizable from the Joe that was being demonized by the gay activists. What can you share about this side of your husband?

Because Joe had many interests that were not typically masculine—he loved art, opera, and cooking—he knew firsthand that a man can be gender-atypical in some ways (that is, esthetically oriented) and still fully embrace his masculine nature. His father gave him that gift, because although his father was tough, he delighted in Joe and would have given his life for him. So Joe had an interesting combination of masculine strength and Alpha-like dominance, but yet another side of feminine tender-heartedness and great affection, especially for children and animals.

I recall Dean Byrd often asking APA folk, “Is there a place for someone like me in the APA?” In this regard, was Joe hopeful or pessimistic about the future of organized psychology? Did he have a belief about where the field of psychology was heading and what was going to happen to clinicians doing this work?

Joe saw that in the short term, things were going to get ugly, and they have. But he believed that reality ultimately comes back to our awareness, and that the truth will reassert itself at some point.

Would the recent explosion in trans activism within psychology and medicine have surprised Joe?

Joe wouldn't have done well with what's happening now, because he had little patience for hiding, mincing words, compromising on the truth, and playing nice with falsity. He would have probably gone on TV and said something, in response to a provocative question, that would have gotten him kicked out of his profession. He was rather Trumpian in his tendency to just say what he thought and let the chips fall where they may. In fact, it was me, throughout his career, always trying to soften his bluntness and the potential for abrasiveness that came with his speaking very forthrightly.

It has now been a few years since Joe's sudden passing, and his loss is still felt by all who knew and cared about him. Could you tell us about your experience being with him during his illness and how you are doing now?

His illness was only for a couple of days, as he died of a virulent strain of the flu. Up to that time he had been going to the gym and working his usual long hours. He died with his boots on, as they say. In some ways that suited his nature as he had little patience with illness or any restriction on his Type-A personality.

I am doing well enough, although a day does not go by that I don't think of my husband. We were together about 40 years.

Although some have distanced themselves from Joe's innovative efforts in providing professional therapeutic care for unwanted same-sex attractions, what do you anticipate will be his ultimate legacy?

I think his main legacy will be that he told the truth about the causes and nature of homosexuality.

What are your current interests and involvements?

I am republishing Joe's books, which were banned by Amazon even though they had been selling very well. A gay activist complained about them, and Amazon caved in and dropped them. I am working on a final book, "The Best of Joe Nicolosi." I'm maintaining Joe's website, josephnicolosi.com.

Is there anything else you would like to say to clinicians and other Alliance members doing work in this arena?

Yes. As I reflect on what's happened to the mental-health profession, I lament the loss of those precious psychoanalytic insights in the now-forgotten clinical literature—the brilliance of the old analysts and their advancement of our understanding of human nature. Unfortunately, a lot of their brilliance is buried under dense technical language and is not accessible to the layman, or even today's clinician. I've tried to wade through it myself and frequently given up in frustration.

I think this shift in the profession all started in the '60s with the mantra, "I'm OK, you're OK." It was the anti-authoritarian demand to be labeled normal just because a person *believed* he was normal. The "I'm OK, you're OK" trend was an outgrowth of the demons inherent in democracy—that ugly leveling effect of the democratic spirit. We now dare any person outside of ourselves to make value judgments of any kind about our chosen identity. "Who is someone else—especially an authority figure—to tell me that my wish to be the opposite sex is not beautiful and good, simply because I say it is?"

As a result, most psychologists have turned the henhouse over to the foxes. The profession has become an empty shell of shallow behavioral studies without attempt at insight. There are endless, grievance-based

studies that demand the affirmation of alternative lifestyles. The latest (coming from gay psychologists) is the push for social affirmation of "consensual non-monogamy." They want psychologists to remove the stigma from promiscuity.

Besides debasing social norms and shaming psychologists of traditional values, the profession is giving up on the search to grasp the totality of our human nature. What a loss!

For those who still seek the truth, I'd say, "Keep the flame burning."