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Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics. In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on

PATTERNS

John Eoyang

Born: December 7, 1929, London, England

Died: May 10, 2009, Maplewood, Minnesota, US

It is about patterns—*Similarities, differences, and relationships that have meaning across space and time.*

When John and I met 32 years ago next month, we came from radically different worlds. His, cosmopolitan and musical. Mine, rural and philosophical. In a chance conversation about Pascal's *Pensees*, we found a shared pattern that caught our attentions and, ultimately, our hearts.

As our passion deepened, we drew our families into the emerging pattern. Megan came to color Easter eggs. Loren let me play *Mother of the Bride*. Ruth gracefully accepted the little orange owl and laughed at all John's jokes. Peggy said, "I'm glad he has you, and I replied, I'm glad he had you." Siblings and in-laws opened hearts and minds and homes to embrace the pair that we were becoming.

Friends, too, (at least most of them) found ways to fold the John/Glenda pattern into their own. Each of our communities was a complex tapestry accumulated over decades and continents.

Robert and Kat were John's adopted grad school parents—half his age, but his equal in curiosity and generosity. My Johnnie friends came to visit. Chicago and Canyon. Mike and Tom. Red cooked hocks and a can of English peas. His clean kitchen and my messy office. Similarities made it seem safe and familiar and easy. Differences kept it stimulating, rich, irritating, and fun. Relationships held us together with each other and with all the other people and institutions that defined who we were as individuals and knitted us together as a family.

Our libraries told many stories about who we were, what we knew, and who we admired in the past, present, and future. The redundancies and wild diversity of our books reflected the paths that each of us had traveled. Merging lives was much more difficult than alphabetizing by author, though. There was no Dewey Decimal System for deciding what stayed and what went and how the collection came

together. The process allowed, even required, innumerable conversations about what mattered and what didn't to him and me and us together.

John had a way of shifting others' patterns. Our friend Elizabeth says that he always asked the question she least wanted to answer, and she was always glad he did. In the prison he taught coping skills to the guards, believing that the context was the key to prisoners' mental health. In the grocery store, he asked people about their lives in the form of culinary advice sought and given. On vacation, he asked the provocative question that sparked evening-long chats and life-long friendships. (He bummed a cigarette from a stranger in a campground shower house, and when asked for a light, he replied, "Get your own **** match!") When he chauffeured elderly ladies to medical appointments, he offered an ear in exchange for stories and cookies. He uttered puns that have stuck in memory for half a century. (Did he really make up, "Goy meets Beryl" on the spot?) Though the edge was sometimes raw, the curiosity and concern were deep and abiding.

We argued. At first it was about whether psychology was a science. At the end it was about whether the curtain was pulled all the way and whether the light was left on in the bathroom. Each question engaged us with ourselves and with each other to weave a life that was unique in every single minute and across a lifetime.

So, tomorrow we will hold a memorial gathering at our home on the lake. Friends and family from across the country and across our lives will come together to tell John Stories. The crowd will include the little nieces who love Unyon, the merchants who are friends, the family who opens their hearts to the surprise and inevitability of our union. You will be here, too, in all the ways you touch us or those who touch us. Megan says we must come together to see who we are, now that he is gone. The pattern that emerges will enfold our past and unfold into the future. Thank you, my love, for both.

Dr. Glenda and Mrs. John Eoyang