

Greetings from Ulrich Ammon

I extend my kindest greetings to Joshua Fishman and his wife Gella on the occasion of Joshua's 80th birthday. I very much wish that both of them will have many more years to live together in happiness. Their deep humanity, which I experienced whenever I met them, has left a lasting impression on me. It extends from their everyday life with family and friends to all of Joshua's admirable scholarship and teaching, which aims at making our world more humane. I have been personally inspired by his work in numerous ways, probably more than by any other sociolinguist.

I first met Joshua personally at the World Congress of Sociology in Toronto in 1974, when he was 48 and I was 31, having become familiar with his work during my studies. We got into a conversation on (my native) Swabian dialect (from Southern Germany) about which he had published an article together with Erika Lueders-Salmon which I commented on in my conference contribution. I still remember the seriousness and deep empathy he purveyed in this conversation, which I had not experienced from some of my German professors, especially those of the older generation. But I also vividly remember my own uneasiness, not triggered by any of his own actions, but arising involuntarily from the awareness of what "my people" had done to "his" during Nazi times. It was an instant of experienced ethnic identity, though I was then not yet familiar with the concept.

When I met Joshua and Gella again later, I dared to address the topic (which has haunted me all my life). It soon became clear to me that they by no means equated Germans with Nazis (but were of course aware of the fact that they had formed the great majority of the group in Nazi times). Though they did not want to travel to Germany as long as so many of the perpetrators were still alive, they finally visited the country in 2005 on the occasion of the LAUD Conference in Landau. I think they both agree with me that young Germans should not be blamed for the crimes their own people committed, but that they have an increased responsibility to defend human rights and the values of humanity against any kind of racism or other prejudice and intolerance. I admire Joshua Fishman for solidly anchoring his scholarship in these values and both him and Gella for living accordingly, and I hope many others will follow their example.