

James J. Murphy and the American Society for the History of Rhetoric: A Personal Reflection

Richard Leo Enos, ASHR Past President

Shortly before Christmas 2021 a gift was taken from us: James J. Murphy passed (as the ancient Romans used to say) into the shades. Of course, many of us knew Jerry as a giant in our field. He was a gentle giant, one who helped scores of students and young professors discover, and fall in love with, Rhetoric. Jerry was 98 years old when he passed. Most of us did not know him directly; we knew him indirectly through his award-winning research, his texts that became standards in our field, and his coordination of countless panels and academic events that he nurtured from an idea at a social gathering into a reality. Undoubtedly, many will epideictically recall his many contributions to scholarship and to the education of his many students. I want to focus in this remembrance on Jerry's important relationship to the American Society for the History of Rhetoric.

Jerry had many gifts. One of them was bringing scholars together, a feat he often accomplished through creating long-lasting professional organizations. I suspect he will be best remembered as one of the Founders of the International Society for the History of Rhetoric (ISHR) and the first Editor of its journal *Rhetorica*, but not many of us realize how instrumental he was in helping to found what was once called ISHR-American Branch that later was renamed the American Society for the History of Rhetoric (ASHR).

Jerry was famous for his "breakfast meetings" at such conferences as SCA (now NCA), CCCC, and RSA. In fact, the history of ASHR began at a breakfast meeting at the 1979 SCA Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Many of us wanted Rhetoric to have more of a presence at our established academic conferences but, as other areas grew, the amount of space for Rhetoric

on panels, and in their corresponding flagship journals, became increasingly limited. In our breakfast meeting in San Antonio, Jerry encouraged us to establish our own American Branch of ISHR that would complement SCA, CCCC and ISHR but still have its own identity. In that San Antonio breakfast meeting I was honored, largely through Jerry's leadership, to witness the birth of ASHR.

Few members will realize that at another SCA Conference at San Antonio Jerry also played an important role for ASHR: the establishing of our own journal. I attended that SCA Conference in 1995 and was struck by the number of excellent papers in the History of Rhetoric that I heard at various panels. I felt, however, that given the limited space devoted to Rhetoric in current journals, that many of these fine panel papers would never be seen in print. I returned to Texas Christian University and received an internal grant that enabled me to start *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* (now known as the *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*). Here again, Jerry Murphy was a source of wisdom and inspiration, his mentorship was an invaluable help in the creation of *Advances* and his contributions should be clearly understood to be a positive force in helping to establish ASHR's own journal.

Each person influenced by Jerry or his work has their own story of how he positively affected their endeavors. I first met Jerry in 1970 and we stayed in contact over the years; we became especially close in the later part of his life. This was due to his leadership in projects such as *A Short History of Writing Instruction* (now in its 4th edition) and his editorial efforts with Marc van der Poel and Mike Edwards in the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Quintilian* (2021). By the time he was able to hold a physical copy of this book in December 2021, Jerry was in hospice care and passed only days later. In his final years, Jerry and I would talk once or twice a month and often exchanged postcards which we both enjoyed collecting,

sending and receiving. Jerry will always be remembered fondly and internationally as a scholar, teacher, and colleague. On a personal and direct level, he should also be remembered as a friend to every rhetorician and for all that he did to help make ASHR the vibrant academic organization that it is today.

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