

Obituary

James Mancuso (1928-2005)

Jim Mancuso was born in Hazelton, Pennsylvania on January 17, 1928. His parents were both first-generation Italian emigrants to the United States. After his father died in 1938, Jim was sent to the Milton Hershey boarding school in Hershey, Pennsylvania, where he attended from 1939 to 1945. In 1946, Jim entered the United States Navy. He served for two years, attaining the rank of Seaman, First Class. After his Navy service, Jim used his GI Bill benefits to attend Dickinson College in Carlisle Pennsylvania. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and English in 1951. Soon after, Jim was awarded a Veteran's Administration Fellowship to attend the University of Rochester. He started graduate studies there in 1952, and was awarded his Ph.D. in psychology in 1958.

While completing his doctoral dissertation, Jim worked as a school psychologist. In this work he found himself "totally inadequate to the task of understanding the problems of the children". To address this, Jim read Piaget's work, including *The Construction of Reality in the Child*. He also found himself attracted to the writings of Donald Hebb and Muzafir Sherif. Around this time, Jim happened to attend a seminar at Rochester in which someone made a comment to the effect of "That sounds like something which would agree with the ideas in George Kelly's Psychology of Personal Constructs". As soon as the seminar was over, Jim went to the library and borrowed Kelly's two volumes, staying awake that night reading the book. He found it highly congruent with the reading he had already been attracted to. Moreover, he found Kelly's constructive alternativism to be congruent with his childhood experiences. As a child, Jim had ample opportunity to test alternative constructions through varied experiences including: growing up a scion of Italian immigrant coal miners, attending a mainly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant/Irish-American elementary school, the death of his father at 10 years of age, and spending six years at the Milton Hershey

school under the influence of the Pennsylvania Dutch.

Jim continued his interest in Kellian constructivism on to his teaching days at SUNY Albany. When one of his graduate students asked him to produce empirical bases for Kelly's postulate and corollaries, Jim took up the challenge. He began to gather articles in support of Kelly's work. By 1966, Jim had amassed a sizable collection, and invited George Kelly to Albany to look over it. Kelly spent a day with Jim, and was very enthusiastic about the project. Unfortunately, he died soon after, and never saw Jim's final plans for publication. In 1970, the collection appeared as *Readings for a Cognitive Theory of Personality*. By any standard, it is a remarkable work. *Readings* unites the contributions of such figures in psychology as Jerome Bruner, Carl Rogers, Muzafir Sherif, Jean Piaget, Charles Osgood, Solomon Asch, Irving Janis, Julian Rotter, and John Flavell (as well as George Kelly himself). It is no wonder Kelly was enthusiastic about the project.

After *Readings* appeared, Jim began communicating with Alvin Landfield of the University of Nebraska. Also at this time, Jim became attracted to the work of Ted Sarbin, and began a collegial association with him. It was Jim who recommended that Sarbin serve as a keynote speaker for the First International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology at Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1975. Thus began Jim's long association with the personal construct psychology community.

Throughout his academic career, Jim produced many important writings. In addition to *Readings*, Jim also wrote *Schizophrenia: Medical Diagnosis or Moral Verdict* (1980) with Ted Sarbin, which was selected as an outstanding academic textbook by *Choice* in 1981. He also co-edited two very successful books with Jack Adams-Webber, *The Construing Person* (1982), and *Applications of Personal Construct Theory* (1983). He joined Mildred Shaw on his fifth book, *Cognition and*

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Personal Structure (1988). Jim was careful to back up his theoretical writing with practical knowledge. Throughout most of his career, he maintained a hand in some kind of applied work. He provided regular consultation for many years to schools and child care agencies. He spent four years as a half-time Veteran's Administration trainee. He obtained his teacher certification and worked for two years as a school psychologist. Jim was careful to avoid the trap of being a "nit-picking" theorist who had, for example, never actually worked with a schizophrenic or a child with AD/HD.

Jim was a master colleague. He placed great emphasis on the relationships he built and maintained as a psychologist and an academic. He was a communicator *par excellence*, usually quite frank, sometimes even controversial, but always looking to engage others in a serious dialogue about what mattered. When he was honoured in 1998 with CPN's (then NAPCN) Lifetime Achievement award, he was asked to describe what he thought the highlights of his career were. He glossed over the obvious achievements—certain books and articles published, his 30-year tenure as a professor. Upon providing his overview, he spontaneously offered this final observation:

"My advice to those who aspire to make contributions to PCP, and constructivism in general: Read assiduously and read very carefully. Keep writing to answer questions you would ask. Circulate your writings to the colleagues who understand our work. Get and use all the feedback that your colleagues offer. Have the good fortune to develop collegial relationships with fine scholars such as Don Bannister, Al Landfield, Ted Sarbin, Mildred Shaw, Seymour Rosenberg, Joseph Rychlak, and Jack Ad-

ams-Webber. And, add to that good fortune the good fortune of working with students such as Douglas Kilgus, Michael Mascolo, Karen Hunter, Michael Arcuri, Michael Gara, Bruce Eimer, Richard Lehrer, Uriel Meshoulam, Thomas Lickona, James Morrison, Richard Hamill, Kenneth Handin, Dorothy McDonald, and many more who deserve to feel slighted because I don't want to lengthen further this overlong communication."

After living in New York State for 50 years, Jim and his wife Susan moved to Los Angeles to be closer to their grown children. Shortly after the move, Jim began to develop a degenerative neuromuscular disorder that made it difficult to control his arm movements. One of his favorite past-times, communicating with colleagues via email, began to decline as Jim was only able to use voice-activated word processing to communicate electronically. As the disorder progressed, Jim's communications declined even further. Jim Mancuso passed away on June 10, 2005.

Robert Hadden, Calgary, Canada

REFERENCE

Hadden, R. (2006). James Mancuso (1928-2005). *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*, 3, 12-13.

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