



# IN MEMORIAM

## James M. Sacks, PhD, TEP

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### **An extraordinary footprint in our hearts and history.**

Jim Sacks lived life to its fullest and knew how to laugh, love, listen, and make those around him know how much they mattered to him. In the world of Psychodrama he represents a time and place in our history characterized by the spontaneity of our first generation of psychodramatists – always saying Yes, yes, yes to creation.

Dr. James Sacks, PhD, TEP received his PhD from the University of Chicago. He was President of ASGPP (1960's) and served on the Executive Council. He received the following ASGPP awards: Fellow, Hannah B. Weiner (1988), JL Moreno (1993), David A. Kipper Scholar's Award (2006) during his professional career. James accomplishments were many as he was brilliant, warm and accepting, thoughtful, attentive, and very inquisitive. He had an active training institute in New York City for many decades and was the trainer of many individuals. James was one of the first elected Board Directors for the American Board of Examiners. He wrote many articles and his article with Hannah Weiner on Warm-Up and Sum-Up is a classic in our literature. He founded the Psychodrama Bibliography which was first printed on mimeograph paper. Jim was an expert on transference and was highly respected and beloved for his significant footprint in the American Group Psychotherapy Association.

Despite Jim's many accomplishments, perhaps Jim is best described through the eyes and words of some of the many that knew and loved him.

### **From his Nephew:**

"My Uncle Jim was one of the 'good guys'. That is about the best way I can say it. He was 21 years older than I. He was funny, kind, always a fabulous storyteller and master of trivial minutiae. Over time, Uncle Jim evolved into my consummate role model. So many of my interests were shaped by him.

In 2001 he was diagnosed with progressive cerebellar ataxia. Despite the progression and frustrations of this, Jim stayed in communication with many on the computer which was his window to the world. In 2017 he moved to the Self Help Home in the north side of Chicago. Despite all the indignities suffered and tolerated attendant to a nursing home, he always managed to smile and laugh and still tell good stories. On June 25th, mere weeks after celebrating his 90th birthday, Uncle Jim passed away."

### **From Dr. Dale Richard Buchanon:**

"In September of 1971 the American Psychiatric Association was meeting in DC and they sponsored a side event being hosted by Saint Elizabeths. I elected to be a session assistant for Jim Sacks and Hannah Weiner. Jim and Hannah were perfect co-directors. She was warm, effusive, and openly loving - he was brilliant, noticed each person in the group, and was kind. They both had an amazing sense of humor. I can't recall who was the protagonist or the theme. But I can tell you by the end of the workshop I was in love and in awe with each of them.

Like Zerka, I never knew him to make an unkind remark about any one person. He had a quiet, gentle and loving presence. He always invited others in and let others have a place in the spotlight while he was content supporting us from the wings. What an extraordinary human being and great psychodramatist!"

### **From Marcia Karp, London:**

"Jim was my good friend. I learned from him a kind of simplicity and innocence about wisdom and knowledge. In 1965 while a graduate student at Columbia University, Jim and I started dating. We were pretty much



inseparable for two years and remained friends forever. We spent our Saturday nights at the Moreno Institute public sessions where I watched Jim direct and played my first auxiliary role. His protagonist was in her 50's and she picked me to play her mother. I thought it was extraordinary.

We were best friends with Hannah Weiner, who gave us the magic shop technique. Jim gave us the judgement technique and was the first one to bring Viola Spolin's theatre games into the warm up process. Jim had been a member of Spolin's SECOND CITY IMPROVISATIONAL TROUPE in Chicago. He learned with comedians Mike Nichols, Elaine May, Shelly Berman, Bob Newhart, Alan Arkin and many others. I think Jim was the only psychologist who took the work outside theatre, film and acting to enhance psychodrama with his learning. When we do warm-ups that are improvisational, we have Jim to thank. He made that crossover which has been globally adopted and adapted.

Jim, you did it your way... we all gained from your humor, your spirit and your intelligence. Unforgettable. "

### **From Anath Garber:**

"It is so important to remind our community about Jim's contribution of improv to warm ups!!!

I so vividly remember his gentility and the vibrant fun when he and Hannah got together, on her night Thu, or Sat (his) at the open sessions. I always felt as a kid allowed to play with the grown-ups."

### **From Daniela Simmons:**

Several weeks ago I turned on my computer one morning to see a surprise email from Jim (James) Sacks. The subject line was "Old Reader", and the email was in regards to my article on "Implementing Sociometry in a Long-Term Care Institutional Setting for the Elderly: Exploring Social Relationships and Choices", recently published in the ASGPP Journal.

The email started in this way:

Dear Dr. Simmons,

I have read your article on sociometry with the elderly. I am both an ex-psychodramatist and a resident in a nursing home for the elderly. (I will be 90 in a few days). I have done only a little sociometry under the definition of Moreno although his was much more limited than yours as it certainly ought to be. For too long a time psychodrama and sociometry have been essentially static instead of growing as all sciences must. The version of sociometry you use certainly builds on Moreno's ideas but adds a lot..."

I was stunned that he had read my article and taken time to write to me. I never met Dr. Sacks in person, nor had I ever been in any contact with him; however, I knew quite a bit about him and his contribution to the field.

The date I received the email from him was 38 days before he died. Hearing about his passing made me incredibly sad; and then grateful that I had the chance to experience what I had heard from others — how gentle, respectful, open minded and encouraging he was towards the following generation of psychodramatists!"

**\*Editor's note:** I saw Psychodrama for the first time in the 1970's at an open session in New York directed by Dr. Jim Sacks. He was my "status nascendi!"