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About Relationships, Not Prerogatives: Editing the *New Jersey English Journal*

By Julius Gottilla

When Rosalind Jones and I assumed the roles of co-editors of the *New Jersey English Journal*, positions we held from 1991-2007, we had a pretty good idea of what the job would entail: selecting and proofreading and sometimes condensing articles; deciding on cover design and layout; keeping to a budget and meeting deadlines; coordinating with the printer; distributing the final product. But what we did not expect - what frankly surprised and humbled us- were the relationships and loyalties that developed over time between us and our writers. Allow me to share four examples.

Perhaps the most moving and heartfelt was our bond with Mary DeSena, an English teacher for many years at J. P. Stevens High School in Edison. Mary enthusiastically submitted her work in pairs—a poem and an article typically based on a seminar she had taken the previous summer. Topics ranged from Dickens’ *Hard Times* and Seamus Heaney’s poem “North” to castles in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the little-known connection between the Don Juan legend and one Lorenzo da Ponte of Elizabeth, NJ. And then came her letter, written just for family and friends, among whom she included Rosalind and me, informing us that she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Rosalind and I decided to dedicate that year’s *Journal* to Mary; indeed, it was the last she lived to see. Upon her death, her daughter requested that, if available, back copies of the magazine be on display at her mother’s wake. Happily, we were able to honor that request. Who could have imagined just how important and meaningful contributing to our little publication was to Mary? Rosalind and I began that year, ever in her memory, the practice of dedicating the *Journal* to one of its faithful contributors and friends.

The following year we dedicated the magazine to Walter H. Johnson, Professor of English at Cumberland County College, who nearly every year sent us an article that reflected his introspection and varied interests: children’s literature, his area of expertise; controversies over the Pulitzer Prize in Drama; the pros and cons of study guides; the complex process of creating a musical, in particular *The Hourglass Café*, for which he wrote the book and lyrics. He even invited Rosalind and me to its premiere at a theater in Pennsylvania.

Glenn G. Coats once shared with Rosalind and me that he was proud to have written longer for the *New Jersey English Journal* than for any other publication. His many poems reflected his work as a Reading Recovery Teacher in Flemington. In 2001, he compiled his poems into his own book, *Trying to Move Mountains*. The acknowledgements to this collection included a special thanks to four people for “their interest and encouragement throughout the years.” But here’s the surprise. Among those four people? Rosalind and I. We dedicated the magazine to Glenn in 2006.

Let me conclude with Edwin Romond, an English teacher for thirty-two years, most of them in New Jersey, whose poems elevated the pages of our *Journal* for many years and whose poetry readings I look forward to attending to this day. Not long after a conversation we had at one of his readings about my 2014 trip to Sicily, the birthplace of all four of my grandparents, did I discover an unexpected package at my door. It was a signed and framed copy of a poem, “Sicily,” which Ed

wrote for me and published in a recent *New Jersey English Journal*. I was overwhelmed by his thoughtfulness and, of course, the generosity of his talent, a talent that Rosalind and I recognized years before when we dedicated the magazine to him in 2007, our last as editors.

In his book, *The Innovator's Mindset*, George Couros identifies the three most important words in education as “relationships, relationships, relationships.” Clearly, these relationships have been for Rosalind and me not just personal validations of our work but memories that live on long past our tenure as editors. And these are the kinds of relationships that seem to have emerged so naturally just by providing a platform for self-expression and shared expression, by providing an “intersection of literacy and democracy,” if you will, that is the very core of an English classroom and the very purpose of our *New Jersey English Journal*.

Julius Gottilla, a former editor of the *New Jersey English Journal* and retired English teacher, still works part-time at Union Catholic High School in Scotch Plains, where he hosts annually NJCTE's Writing Contest Awards Ceremony.

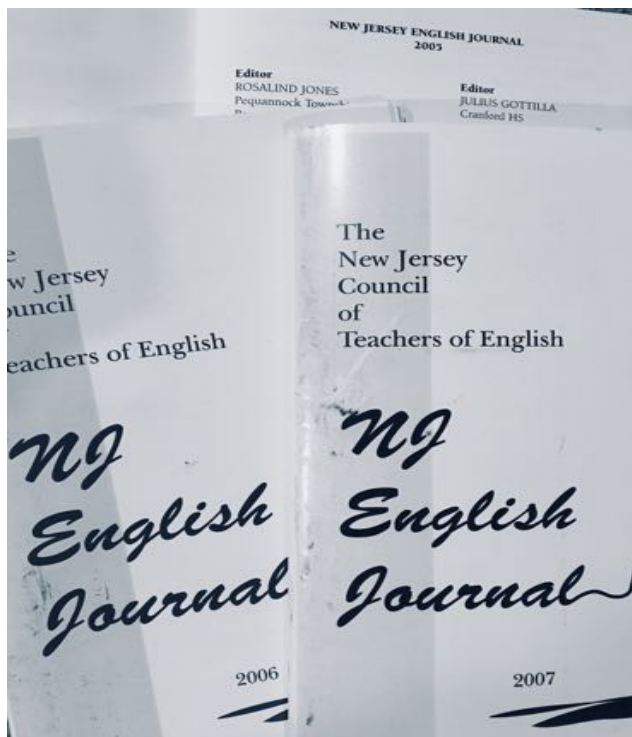


Image of the journal when the author served as editor.