



Photo of John J. Pauly by Kevin Pauly

Remembrance: John Pauly

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John James Pauly, Jr.
Marquette University, United States
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Oh, John Pauly, you kind, sweet man. I will miss you.” That was my first response when I learned of John’s death. To call John “sweet” may seem a bit peculiar or quaint. But it so fit John. Just ask David Abrahamson. “Although sweetness is not a quality most memorial texts feature,” says David, “John Pauly was one of the sweetest people I have ever been able to claim as a friend and colleague. His encouragement sustained me, and his easy, always kind laughter bespoke a generous and smiling view of life. I shall miss him terribly.”

In July, I followed John’s emails to several of us that updated the progress of the cancer, slowly taking him away from us. And so I called him one afternoon and we talked and talked. Two and a half hours later we hung up. When I called him again in August, I was only able to leave a message. By then he was mostly sleeping and obviously fading. I had hopes of seeing him one last time, but it didn’t happen.

Gathering comments from those who knew John to write this reflection has been a very emotional and occasionally heart-wrenching task. We first met and became friends thirty-five years ago, at the second annual conference of the American Journalism Historians Association.

Although he was two years younger than I, he nevertheless became my intellectual mentor as well as close friend. I had a master’s degree in journalism, specializing in public affairs reporting, and had worked at newspapers and the Associated Press. But my PhD was in English. My dissertation made a case for a “literary” type of journalism in the 1890s newspaper. I wasn’t at all sure how or what to do with all this, but John provided guidance and encouragement, helping me find direction.

Perhaps one of the best ways to acknowledge John and his influence is to allow several who knew him or worked and studied with him to tell their stories in their own words, beginning with Norman Sims, Linda Steiner, and Dean Krugman, who were in graduate school with John at the University of Illinois, where they studied with James Carey.

Norman Sims

Carey advocated something we called the cultural approach to communication research. He did not mean what “cultural studies” means today. Rooted in humanism and intellectual diversity, Carey’s approach irritated a great many professors elsewhere who were immersed in behaviorism and formalistic approaches to communications. They tried, unsuccessfully, to keep Carey from becoming president of AEJMC.

One time during our graduate careers, probably in an effort to broaden our perspectives, students from several Midwestern universities were brought together to talk about our research. I remember graduate students from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan being at the gathering. It was a lot of fun, and astonishing in some ways. One grad student told us, for example, that at his university they read nothing more than ten years old. At Illinois, in contrast, we concentrated on original works by John Dewey, Harold Adams Innis, Richard Hoggart, and Walter Ong, among others. I don’t believe we read many books as young as ten years.

At one evening session, one person from each university took the stage and elaborated on the scholarly foundations of their work. John Pauly was our representative. John was nervous as a mouse before going onstage. Describing Dr. Carey’s system of thought was a task filled with difficulties, especially in front of an audience who had not done the background reading. Nor did any of us have a strong enough grasp of Carey’s thinking to enable explanation. Almost immediately, someone asked John to explain the cultural approach to communications.

I stood on the side in amazement as John responded. Even to this audience, his explanation of the cultural approach seemed coherent, things matched up, and the approach was a reasonable response to a complicated and interconnected modern world. John received applause as he walked off the stage. I was the first to greet him. “John,” I said, “that was the best explanation of the cultural approach that I’ve ever heard.” His eyes darted around. He still had that jittery mouse look. He blinked a few times, then said, “What did I say?” He was so nervous that he couldn’t remember a word he had said. Neither of us was ever able to reconstruct his answer. But John understood even if he couldn’t repeat his explanation.

In the decades that passed since then, I came to believe that John Pauly had come closer to the mark set by Jim Carey than most of our class of grad students. Carey had been a dean; Pauly became a dean and then provost at Marquette University. Neither scholar was a writer of books; both used essays and articles to explore wide-ranging issues. And both became close friends with their students and colleagues. Carey was a Catholic, and Pauly almost always taught

at Catholic universities such as Marquette, St. Louis University, and Fordham. Something in Carey’s cultural approach seemed to fit well at those universities.

Linda Steiner

John Pauly was a friend from graduate school—but clearly among the intellectual heavyweights in my grad school cohort. From day one, John knew how to talk like a scholar. I did not, so I was quite impressed. Part of his advantage was that he could talk about sports—that is, talk as an intellectual about sports. And it was not only to agree with Jim Carey, our adviser, that baseball was the genuine nineteenth-century sport; after all, lots of people understood baseball in this way. John could also be intellectual about bowling! What a concept! I associated bowling with working class and even rather tough guys with tattoos, who went bowling (at least in Schenectady, New York) mainly for the opportunity to drink Pabst beer. John convinced us all that bowling, at least as “performed” in the LaGrange and other Chicago suburbs, represented a particular form of community bonding, its rituals rich in opportunities for communal life.

John developed a good “bead” on all sorts of academic politics that went wholly over my head. Over the years, in reminiscing about Illinois, it became clear that even at the time John understood who at Illinois were the people generally on good terms with one another and who were the secret (and not-so-secret) backstabbers. “Didn’t you notice,” John asked me, “how Dr. X and Dr. Y would glare at each other at college events. And don’t you remember that it was because of . . . ?” No, I hadn’t noticed. I had no idea. Maybe such powers of observation and analysis was key to his wise stewardship both as dean and then/soon thereafter as provost at Marquette. He clearly faced, and faced down, some tricky political problems and thorny ethical dilemmas as provost—one in particular involved some frogs, I think.

Dean Krugman

John was a wonderfully supportive friend with an instinct for how people operated. After conceptualizing, collecting, and analyzing data, I wrote the first couple chapters of my dissertation. The result was workmanlike. Good stuff, said my adviser Arnold Barban, but it needs an editing, not a proofreading, an editing. I turned to John and asked for his comments. He unflinchingly said yes, carved up the two chapters and handed them back in quick order. While words and meaning were not changed, John demonstrated a tone and phrasing that not only resonated but completely fit my style. Template set, the rest of the chapters came easy. Simply put, John understood where his pal was coming from and edited and guided accordingly. I have frequently credited John for his writing tutelage.

And now here are comments from a few scholars and teachers who came to know and appreciate John more recently, in the years of his academic career.

David Abrahamson

As a scholar, John Pauly was without peer. Yes, he swam against the prevailing tide in the academy by choosing the article/essay as his preferred medium, rather than book-length works. I know this for a fact because I once commissioned John to write a book, and at his death fifteen years later the manuscript had yet to materialize. Nevertheless, I uniformly revered John's articles, essays, and presentations. Without fail they provided his fellow scholars with the most eloquent statements of his extraordinarily insightful ideas. We professors, per force, are required to read a lot of dross; after enduring the pain of such tasks, I inevitably found John's articles to be the perfect antidote. Simply put, they were the paragon of intellectual excellence—and I confess that being able to claim that John was a colleague made me proud to call myself a professor.

Nancy Roberts

It's heartbreaking to lose John—such a brilliant, kindhearted, down-to-earth, modest man. I met him sometime in the early 1980s, likely at a conference, and then when I was the book review editor for *American Journalism* (1989–1993), he was the editor-in-chief; and I worked closely with him. He was one of the smartest and most original thinkers I ever knew. And he was a marvelous mentor to so many—his students, other scholars, and the faculty colleagues whose tenure and promotion cases he oversaw in his many years as a highly respected administrator. The last time I saw him was about a year and a half ago, when he came to my university to serve as an external reviewer for our journalism program. Although his health was failing, he was as thoughtful, insightful, and helpful as always, with that telltale spark in his eyes when something tickled him. We had a wide-ranging conversation about his research on the New Journalism and also about his family. (I always admired the loving way he talked about them over the years.) Rest in peace, dear friend.

Roberta Maguire

So here's my memory—and it is a recent one. As John was entering his last month of life, he reached out to Bill Dow and me to let us know that one of the two chapters he had agreed to write for our Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism—on the *New Yorker*—he would not be able to finish. Here the man was, in his last month of life, more concerned for us and our project than for himself. Classic John. But there is more: He sent on

his notes for the unfinished chapter to me and offered to talk with me about his argument, in case we wanted to do something with the quite substantial research and thinking he had done (in fact, Josh Roiland has picked up the project). I read John's notes, which were of course very thorough and interesting, and called him at our appointed time. John was enthusiastic, told me his new ideas since he had sent on his notes, and we engaged in a very high-level conversation for at least half an hour. He never mentioned himself. He stayed interested in and excited about ideas. Josh is picking up the work, and like the true mentor John always was, he left Josh a wonderful roadmap—with signposts, to be sure, but with enough open space for Josh now to put his own mark on the project. Again, classic John. He was a light in this world.

Miles Maguire

One of things that I think would have amused, and pleased, John about his memorial service is that three different eulogists—his son, a colleague from Marquette, and one from St. Louis University—all settled on the same phrase to describe him. As each one spoke in turn, they all fell back on the same quote, sometimes attributed to Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

There’s a good reason why they all ended up in that place—John had a gift for making you feel important, important to him at that moment and important for whatever it was you were saying—whether it was scholarship or chit-chat or anything in between. He made you feel that he was genuinely and deeply interested in whatever your work might be at a given moment but also who you were at that moment, how things were going for you, and how you were doing. That’s not something you can fake. He made you feel that he cared, because he did actually care.

Tom Connery: Final Thoughts

As Miles pointed out when I was talking with him, John had chosen the Grateful Dead’s “Ripple” to be played at his memorial and so it seems only fitting to conclude this remembrance with those words:

If my words did glow with the gold of sunshine/
And my tunes were played on the harp unstrung/
Would you hear my voice come through the music/
Would you hold it near as it were your own?

It's a hand-me-down, the thoughts are broken/
Perhaps they're better left unsung/
I don't know, don't really care/

Let there be songs to fill the air/

Ripple in still water/
When there is no pebble tossed/
Nor wind to blow

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty/
If your cup is full may it be again/
Let it be known there is a fountain/
That was not made by the hands of men

There is a road, no simple highway/
Between the dawn and the dark of night/
And if you go no one may follow/
That path is for your steps alone

Ripple in still water/
When there is no pebble tossed/
Nor wind to blow

You who choose to lead must follow/
But if you fall you fall alone/
If you should stand then who's to guide you?
If I knew the way I would take you home

Rest in peace, my friend—we will miss you.

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