

Jason Millman

September 6, 1933 — February 22, 1998

On February 22, 1998 the faculty of the Department of Education, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Cornell University lost a valued and honored colleague. Following a long illness, Jason Millman, Professor of Educational Research Methodology, died from the effects of Shy-Drager Syndrome while with his family in Lake Oswego, Oregon.

Jay joined the Cornell faculty in 1960, immediately after completing his doctoral work in psychometrics at the University of Michigan. In the ensuing years, he rose to prominence in the field of educational tests and measurement. His professional accomplishments are too numerous to detail here. Suffice it to say that he was the author or co-author of a very large number of books, book chapters, journal articles and research reports. He frequently served as a consultant to agencies of the federal government, to the governments of a number of states, and to a host of school districts around the country. He advised Boards of Law Examiners of several states regarding their bar examinations. He was elected president of the National Council of Measurement in Education, which recognized his achievements with its Distinguished Career Award in 1996. He served as a vice president of the American Educational Research Association. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Assessment Governing Board, the policy making body for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Despite such professional accomplishments, it is telling of Jay's character that many of his closest friends and colleagues at Cornell had little idea of his stature in his field. He was a thoroughly modest man, ungiven to boasting in any form.

If Jay's modesty sometimes hid his professional accomplishments from the Cornell community, other aspects of his nature made him a recognized and valued member of it. The power of his intellect and insight, his willingness to help others, and his ability to be an encouraging and reflective critic were obvious to everyone with whom he worked. Despite the demands on his time, he was always willing to spend hours carefully reading and perceptively commenting on manuscripts written by students or colleagues. He was especially generous in this way when helping junior colleagues launch their research careers. A paper given to Jay for comment might come back with everything from several pages of closely reasoned analysis of its argument to the correction of a misplaced semicolon. Indeed, a fellow member of the faculty once remarked that Jay's comments on one of his papers were more extensive, more thoughtful, and more deserving of publication than the paper itself.

Jay's willingness to help others went well beyond his profession and the university. It was also reflected in his contributions to the Ithaca community. From 1987 until the very end of his life, he gave thousands of hours of his time to the Suicide Prevention and Crisis Service. He was a phone counselor who frequently volunteered to spend entire nights manning the Service's telephones in order to be available to troubled residents of Ithaca. He contributed his expertise in program evaluation to helping that agency improve its services to the city. He served on its board of directors. Out of this experience he was instrumental in preparing a book, *Talking with the Caller: Guidelines for Crisisline and Other Volunteer Counselors* (Sage Publications, in press) that will serve as a resource manual for similar crisis intervention centers around the country. It is a testament to his character that he contributed his share of the royalties from this book to the local agency.

The paragraphs above might leave the impression that our colleague had a superb intellect, that he made numerous contributions to his profession and to Cornell, and that he gave freely of his time to help others. All of that is true, but it would miss important aspects of Jay's character. Perhaps what everyone noticed first about him was his wit, his *joie de vivre*, his sense of humor, and his playfulness. He was always ready to laugh, perhaps most quickly at himself. He loved to dance and was active in pop and contra dancing organizations in Ithaca. He was an avid poker player and a founding member of what must be one of the longest running poker games in Cornell's history. He excelled in virtually all racquet sports, from tennis to ping-pong.

In 1995, the Department of Education recognized Jay's contributions by establishing the Jason Millman Promising Scholar Program. After a comprehensive, national search, the department annually selects a person who has earned a Ph.D. degree within the previous five years, whose work promises to make a major contribution to educational research and practice. Winners are invited to the Cornell campus where they make a presentation open to the entire community, lead a seminar for faculty and students of the department, and meet with individuals with similar research interests. It is particularly appropriate to honor Jay in this manner. Certainly he freely gave his time to help his junior colleagues establish their research careers. But just as certainly, as a recent Ph.D. in the early 1960s, he was himself a promising scholar--one who went on to amply fulfill that promise.

The last years of Jay's life were difficult ones. Shy-Drager Syndrome is a rare and incurable neurological disorder characterized by the slow, progressive failure of the autonomic nervous system. This vigorous, fun-loving, vivacious, and joyful man ended life confined to a wheelchair and able to speak only with great difficulty. Yet, to the end his mind was as sharp as ever, and he was actively writing, consulting, and working with national professional

associations. And to the end, he was as warm, as quick to laugh, and as compassionate as ever. Jason met death with courage, with grace, and with dignity, an inspiration to all who knew him.

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