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A Tribute to James B. Boskey

By Lela Porter Love

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

It is rare that the passing of a single individual can touch so many corners and lives in an international field. James B. Boskey was one such person.

Jim's reputation as a walking database on ADR was so pervasive that the breadth and depth of his other pursuits is surprising. He was an accomplished scholar who studied at the London School of Economics and a recognized expert on family law and children's rights. He was a gifted teacher, demystifying torts, contracts and property. He was an entertainer with a zest for life, acting with local theater groups and regularly regaling his classes with renditions of Gilbert and Sullivan. He was a man of diverse intellectual curiosity, with history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, science, art and poetry at his fingertips. (I recall quoting to Jim the first few lines from

The Hunting of the Snark, by Lewis Carroll. To my astonishment, he interrupted me and, without missing a beat, concluded the verse.)

Yet, despite these gifts, Jim Boskey was remarkably unpretentious. He once commented in *The Alternative Newsletter* that many seasoned mediators couldn't really explain why mediations

succeeded in certain instances – and in fact it could be that any third party, even a "seamstress' dummy," would have a beneficial effect on disputing parties. Jim later put a more scholarly frame on the idea, suggesting it was a "Hawthorne effect" similar to that found in a study showing that worker output increases when management takes an interest, regardless of the particular intervention. Jim's ability to appreciate and recognize the importance of simply being there seemed both accurate and characteristic of an admirable humility.

Jim became known and appreciated world-over for his publication of *The Alternative Newsletter*, a resource guide on ADR published quarterly, now in its tenth year. The publication was a boon for newcomers to ADR, as well as veterans, providing a window into all of its many dimensions. It was the voice of the community, and in many respects helped hold a diverse field together. Characteristically, he charged only \$15 a year, just enough to cover his

printing and mailing costs. Jim was a "giver," without stint or regard for any gain, whether it was reading for the blind (which he did every Tuesday morning for six years) or extending himself to minority and disadvantaged law students or rendering multiple services in connection with ADR.

Jim relentlessly voiced his opinion in the pages of *The Alternative Newsletter* without mincing words. He also welcomed – and published – the responses, thus showcasing the best principles this field embraces. Adele Boskey, Jim's wife, says Jim had no enemies (from his own perspective). He had mastered the art of disagreeing without being disagreeable.

In the last period of his life, as he suffered and went in and out of mental coherency as a result of cancer, Jim's main concern was not with his own well-being, but rather in continuing his service to the field. While enduring a severe headache, for example, he worked 14 hours straight one day to help coordinate the planning of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution annual conference. Above all, even in the final week of his life, he wanted to get *The Alternative Newsletter* to press.

Jim Boskey was a *pater familia* to this field and the many people and institutions in it whose lives he touched, as the testimonials on these pages bear witness. As greatly as he was loved and appreciated, he will be deeply missed.

Some people are truly irreplaceable. Aside from all of his other good works and good deeds, Jim helped all of us in a remarkably comprehensive, yet intensely personal way, to keep up with a burgeoning field. As a member of the Editorial Board of Dispute Resolution Magazine, he would invariably come up with novel and interesting ideas. How will we possibly function without his inspired guidance?

Frank E.A. Sander
Harvard Law School

*As our field continues to grow, much of the historical credit should go to Jim Boskey. He was an inspiration to us all as a model of a peacemaker who channeled his talent and energy into making the world a better place. It seems impossible to believe that one person could assemble all the information in *The Alternative Newsletter*, and it may take an entire staff to continue putting out this publication. But no one could duplicate Jim's love for the field that was evident in every review, note, and blurb.*

Woody Mosten
Los Angeles, Calif.



James B. Boskey

If Jim Boskey didn't exist, we would have had to invent him. He was that critical to the development of the dispute resolution field. But, even then, our invention would not have come close to replicating the wonderful person that Jim was. We could have created an information clearinghouse, but we could not have infused it with the sensitivity, good judgment, and humanity that he brought to the field. Jim Boskey was the soul of the ADR movement.

James Alfini

**Northern Illinois College of Law
Chair-Elect, ABA Section of Dispute Resolution**

Jim Boskey focused his able efforts on the substance of the dispute resolution field and his kindness on the earnest people who were, like him, drawn to it. He did not have regard for the status of people or institutions. He had the right set of priorities to make a difference, and he did.

**Nancy Rogers
Ohio State University**

Jim Boskey was a rare and fine human being who cannot ever be replaced! I hope there will be many scholarships, awards, etc. in his name.

**Zena Zumeta
Ann Arbor, Mich.**

Jim Boskey was a wonderful clinician, a thoughtful ADR scholar and skilled practitioner. I met Jim through the Association of American Law Schools sections on Clinical Legal Education and Alternative Dispute Resolution; he was active in both. In fact, at his urging, I became the chair-elect of the ADR Section when he was chair in 1995. The program he presented on transformative mediation at the annual meeting was one of the best we've seen.

**Carol Izumi
George Washington University
School of Law**

It seems unimaginable that Jim Boskey could put out The Alternative Newsletter, teach a full load at Seton Hall Law School, write and edit so prolifically, participate as a volunteer in so many organizations, train neutrals, arbitrate and mediate, consult and yet have time left over help out and share his time and knowledge with so many of us who thought of him as a mentor. Even then, he still found time other contributions, such as founding the Children's Rights Committee of the New Jersey State Bar Association and other efforts to deal with child abuse.

**Neal Blacker
Jersey City, N.J.**

Jim Boskey was an incredible asset to this field and every practitioner in it. His willingness to assist, volunteer and lend his expertise was unending. Every where I turn, I continue to see Jim's name and the stamp of his involvement – from the SPIDR program committee, to the ABA's Dispute Resolution Magazine, to The Alternatives Newsletter. It will take all of us to fill the void that he has left, but through his generous spirit and tremendous contributions, there is no doubt that his legacy will continue.

**Sharon Press
President-Elect, SPIDR**

Jim Boskey seemed to touch every aspect of my professional life, as he did many others. He wrote letters on behalf of my tenure and promotion as a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. He served as an evaluator of the college's Dispute

Resolution Program, was a member of the Advisory Board of our Dispute Resolution Consortium (a Hewlett-funded research center), and frequently played crucial roles with the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution. In all of these, he again and again showed his breadth of knowledge, wisdom of judgment, and, unfailingly, his sense of humor. I am, we all are, the better for his service.

Maria Volpe

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice
City University of New York**

In 1997, the judges of the CPR Awards Program voted a Special Achievement Award to Professor Boskey, citing his Alternatives newsletter as a remarkable, unique ADR resource and the man himself as "ubiquitous and all-encompassing." The field was very fortunate to have Jim and his important contribution.

**James F. Henry
CPR Institute for Dispute Resolution**

Jim seemed to have a much faster internal modem than most people, able to process information at incredible speeds. Before many of us were familiar with e-mail he was making optimal use of it. A request posted to a list-serv that he was subscribed to would get more information than you could imagine in less than 24 hours. He scanned the Internet for information and not only compiled it, but gave his opinion of its value. We will miss him online, but his absence at meetings and conferences will be most deeply felt.

**John Helie
Mediate.Com**

Jim Boskey is of course well-known for his tireless efforts on behalf of the dispute resolution field. But less may be known about Jim's great sense of humor and his kindness to young people trying to break into this field. He served as a member of the International Advisory Board for Negotiation Journal, and despite all his other commitments, Jim always found the time to provide useful, constructive criticism to our prospective authors – telling them in detail how they might be able to "fix" a problem, or suggesting they just forget it and start all over again. As he once wrote on a truly hopeless piece of work, "there's no there there," although he did note his appreciation of the writer's effort to lead the reader somewhere. His book reviews here and elsewhere were also priceless.

**J. William Breslin
Executive Editor
Negotiation Journal**

The daughter of a friend e-mailed me recently and asked for ideas about finding an ADR-related job in Africa. I recommended The Alternative Newsletter, noting "If there is an opportunity in the field, Boskey will know about it." She wrote back and asked if she could use my name in arranging to meet him. I said: "No, I don't know Boskey personally. I am convinced 'Boskey' is the name of a large group of people. No one person could accomplish what Boskey does. A perfect stranger can e-mail Boskey with a question and get a considered, detailed, well-researched, thoughtful answer within a day."

And now Boskey is dead. It's like the world has been robbed.

**Barry Goldman
Via ADR List Service**