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Founders Award Acceptance Speech (18 December 2020)

JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

Georgia State University, Perimeter College

(What follows is a slightly revised version of the address that Jeffrey A. Portnoy delivered on December 18, 2020, at the Zoom Awards Ceremony during the COVID pandemic. Portnoy received the Founders Award in recognition of his inauguration and editorship of NCHC publications during the past two decades.)

Abstract: Jeffrey A. Portnoy offers some history of the journals and monographs published by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) as well as insights into the work done by NCHC's Publications Board and its editors. He provides several morals or lessons based on his leadership roles and long career in honors education.

Keywords: learned institutions and societies; scholarly publishing; editorial review; National Collegiate Honors Council (Lincoln, NE); Georgia State University, Perimeter College (GA)—Honors College

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I am honored to be the fifth recipient of the National Collegiate Honors Council Founders Award. I am most grateful to President Elaine Torda, the Awards Committee, the Board of Directors, and the staff of NCHC for this recognition of the part I have played in helping this organization grow and in promoting its publications as a longstanding co-chair of NCHC's Publications Board and General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series.

Receiving this award online through Zoom is bittersweet, bitter because of the devastation the pandemic has wrought to people's lives and to higher education as well as the blow to our sense of community when our gathering

in November 2020 had to be canceled. When I first learned that I would receive this honor, one of the joys was anticipating the celebration at the Awards Ceremony and in the lobby bar at the conference hotel in Dallas with many of you—honors students, staff, faculty, administrators, and especially three previous recipients of this award: Bernice Braid, Ada Long, and Joan Digby. They are three of my favorite people—not just in honors but on the planet. Their contributions have transformed the honors universe. The four of us have been involved in a great many projects together, and for decades I have dubbed them the Three Wise Women of NCHC. It is a privilege to share this Founders Award distinction with them.

This moment is also a little awkward for me, as Ada can attest because she serves as editor of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* and *Honors in Practice (HIP)*. Editors like us prefer to work behind the scenes. The stage and the limelight belong to the authors we support. Our tasks are the stuff of shadow, a nuanced palimpsest, or just a mention inscribed in smaller fonts on an inner page filled with publication speak. But here is a glimpse behind the Green Curtain: my last twelve months have been spent editing and proofing—at least four times apiece—two new monographs (*Building Honors Contracts: Insights and Oversights* and *Internationalizing Honors*) totaling approximately 800 pages. Labors of love certainly, but meticulous labor, requiring slow and slower reading.

Publications require a village. Producing the NCHC Monograph Series has depended on the support, financial and otherwise, of the Board of Directors, the many other NCHC committees, the NCHC staff in Lincoln, and, of course, the authors and anthology editors whose essays and energy fuel the monograph series. Thank you, one and all.

Of course, I am particularly indebted to NCHC's Publications Board—my academic home in the richest sense. I have had the great honor of serving as co-chair of that committee for many years, and it has always been and remains my favorite group: its members are the smartest and hardest-working and most productive people with whom I have ever been associated. Here is the wit and wisdom I have gained on the Pub Board and can offer to students: when you serve as a leader or supervisor or chair, always involve people in the enterprise who are smarter and more talented than you are. On that score, I have been many times enriched through the years by all the members of Pub Board but especially by my fellow co-chairs. First, Norm Weiner and I built on the spirit and values we absorbed when we were the 1997 rookie class on the Publications Board and then honed as the committee leaders when we began

re-envisioning NCHC's publications, including *JNCHC*, which published its initial volume in 2000 with Ada Long and Dail Mullins as its founding editors. Norm and I also established the longstanding tradition of rewarding committee members for their labor by always meeting in great locations and enjoying fine dining.

Norm, like two other co-chairs—Hallie Savage and Richard Badenhauen—eventually went on to greater organizational glories as NCHC presidents. Joan Digby had already served as president of NCHC before she became a co-chair. A thank you to all of them and to current co-chairs Linda Frost and Rusty Rushton, deeply heartfelt, feels insufficient.

When we first established *JNCHC* followed by *HIP* and then conjured the NCHC Monograph Series, several ideas propelled us: we wanted to create platforms for honors research and for the ideas, insights, and wisdom that honors practitioners needed to share. We also wanted to offer a professional face for the organization beyond NCHC's wonderful conferences with their featured events like Beginning in Honors (BIH), Developing in Honors (DIH), plenary sessions, City as Text™ (CAT), and Partners in the Parks (PITP)—all of which connect to students, novices to honors, and grizzled veterans like myself. For many of us on Pub Board, we were so consumed by our work in the trenches—encouraging, reviewing, and editing authors; moving finished texts through the publication process into print; promoting and creating online access; and reaching readers—that we perhaps did not realize until recently the extent of the literary resources we had fashioned. For example, the 2020 essay in *JNCHC* 21.1 by Emily Walshe, our resident librarian on Pub Board, demonstrates that NCHC's publications have reached well beyond its membership to hundreds of thousands of readers around the world. It is easy now to stand amaz'd by the number of people NCHC publications have touched and the shelves we have filled.

I have been blessed to have spent the majority of my working life in honors education and as a member of NCHC. Here, I must thank my home institution of twenty-five years—through all of its name changes (DeKalb College, Georgia Perimeter College, and Perimeter College of Georgia State University)—for supporting my honors endeavors despite limited resources. If some sort of moral emerges out of the career trajectory that has landed me in the Founders Award garden, I suspect that it reads like the following for students. I hope that you will find somewhere early in your careers a community, albeit occasionally fractious and dysfunctional, of co-conspirators that resonates for you as NCHC did for me. I found not only a calling but an

enterprise in the NCHC Monograph Series worth nurturing. While struggling back in 2005 to edit the first two or three entries in the series, I never contemplated that fifteen years later, the series would contain over twenty book-length studies and that I would be honored with this Founders Award. In retrospect I can affirm the value, dear students and colleagues, of sustained work in the garden where you are planted and experiencing the wonders of what blossoms there.

Dig in and stay safe.

The author may be contacted at

jportnoy@gsu.edu.