

Funeral Service for James Morris

James Morris

June 27, 1943 – July 18, 2021

Funeral Service
Minister: Guy Pontecorvo

July 31, 2021

Minister's Introduction:

Welcome friends.

We have come together today to honor the life of our beloved friend, James Morris.

We are here to hold James in our hearts for this brief period, and then release him, together transforming our sorrow into presence.

At the death of a friend, we can see their play as a whole. We can see it as we cannot yet fully see our own: as a perfect, complete, and realized destiny. As we contemplate James' quiet, dedicated life, we more clearly understand the payment and contribution that he made.

Goethe said that our highest understanding, kept within ourselves, lends to our actions "a lustre like the mild radiance of a hidden sun." James communicated his highest understanding through service rather than words. His calm and warm demeanor radiated a presence gained through resolute acceptance.

Let us stand and remember James in silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank you.

The physical body is designed to produce presence and being, and then to be laid aside. Walt Whitman said, "The best of me then, when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly striving." James takes with him the presence that he has gained in this lifetime, and his connection with Influence C. Our teacher has said, "That is all we can take with us, but it is more than enough."

[Reading: Sonnet 53 by Shakespeare]

(Reader: Julian Branston)

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new.
Speak of the spring and foison of the year:
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your bounty doth appear;
And you in every blessed shape we know.
 In all external grace you have some part,
 But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

[**Music:** “Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit” (God’s time is the best time),
BWW 106, by J. S. Bach]

(Musicians: Marina Swales, piano; Claire Walker, piano)

[**Eulogy:** Curtis Evarts]

When James was asked what he valued most about being in the Fellowship, he responded with characteristic depth and brevity: “Now there is purpose in my life.” He expressed that purpose through decades of dedicated service. He began working on salary at Apollo on the first of January, 1979, and continued without interruption until his death. He was an essential support of so many octaves that there are few activities at Apollo that he has not influenced and enhanced. He was a true Apollonian.

James was an integral part of the fabric of Apollo for so many of us. We saw him over the years at his table at lunch at Apollo d’Oro, or singing with the choir, or greeting us from the gatehouse with his never-failing smile. Yet because he did not take on any more visible, public roles it was easy to miss how much he was doing behind the scenes.

As a child and young man, James was an overachiever. He was born in Detroit in 1943 and—as a child—moved to California with his family. He was a straight-A student who became valedictorian of his class at high school. His

love of music was always evident; from an early age he performed with choirs and glee clubs. He received a full scholarship to an exclusive private college and graduated with a degree in zoology. He then began working for a prestigious biomedical research center in Massachusetts, but, perhaps influenced by a growing magnetic center, he left to become a Peace Corps volunteer in 1968. For two years he served as an elementary science teacher in an isolated village in Nepal. But, after becoming seriously ill with typhoid fever, he had to be airlifted out. James later said that although he didn't think his Nepali students ever really understood the scientific method, he did gain a broader understanding of the many ways in which people confront the challenges of life—all of them valid.

In 1974 he joined the school in Los Angeles. Nine months later, after participating in the New Year's Eve toast at Apollo, he and Guinevere Mueller left to drive back to Los Angeles, and were both badly injured in an accident. Guinevere relates the story that, when recuperating at the San Francisco teaching house, they led a prospective student meeting; Guinevere had her leg in a cast propped up on a footstool, and James had his leg propped up on another. The prospective student wanted to join after the first meeting. When they asked him why, he said, "Considering your condition, I felt it must be a serious school!" James later said that he did not resent the accident, because the insurance payment allowed him to move to Apollo.

James' first octave at Apollo was working in the kitchen. He liked to bake—especially cookies—and was famous for his apple strudel. He was a perfectionist and would work at a recipe until it met his standards. He never lost his pleasure in baking, and every year at Thanksgiving would show up at his friends' home for dinner with a pear tart. And he always had a story of how he had managed to find ripe pears in November.

When Robert established the Pressroom, James was the first printer; he learned to set type and operate the hand presses and color press. During that time all the daily cards and concert programs, as well as the *Renaissance Journal* with its beautiful full-color art covers, were printed manually, one page at a time. The memory of James in the Pressroom is still vivid: standing in his white lab coat, composing stick in hand, or pulling down the big lever of the Albion press over and over again.

James later found his way to the Maintenance Department, where he served as administrative assistant for some twenty years. This was a period of great expansion at Apollo—roads were built, the Abundance Park was created, and much more. Maintenance had a crew of a dozen people and James ran the software that tracked projects across the property; the phones rang non-stop and one of his daily tasks was to process all the requests that came in and generate work orders for the crew. He typically came into the office seven days a week.

Later, as Apollo entered a quieter phase, James played a similar role for the Landscaping Office and for security at the High Gate. For many years he worked bottling wine at Grant and Marie's "Little Winery"—always there, present, ready to help, calm. In everything he did, he was thorough and meticulous.

But he never lost sight of his main love, music. James was a naturally musical being—passionate about and committed to music. He was in many ways the heart of the music octave at Apollo. He was part of the Apollo Choir from its inception and sang in every performance. He was also one of the first members of the Orfeo Ensemble. He had a long-running role of turning pages for the musicians. Although he had no interest in modern technology and held fast to his old flip-top phone, he purchased software that allowed him to manipulate musical scores for musicians, and he transposed them to higher and lower keys to suit individual singers. He was the archivist for the music library, and created an exhaustive database of all the scores. He helped to translate the texts of songs and operas, striving to make them poetic and to bring out their connection with self-remembering.

During predictably chaotic rehearsals that could last for many hours, James was a reliable guiding force, an oasis of calm. He worked hard and he expected others to do the same. He wanted the music to be excellent.

One Apollo pianist said that James was like a “magic person” when he turned the pages—he was “extra good.” She went on to say, “James was very special to me. Performing on the stage is always scary. He helped me to be brave, telling me I was beautiful and talented, which no one had ever told me. Those simple words helped very much.”

James was quiet and yet sociable, with an understated humor that was never far away. He was an expert bridge player and competed in national tournaments. He had a beautiful reading voice and especially loved to recite Walt Whitman. He was a loyal and helpful friend. One student who moved from a distant country to Apollo revealed, “He taught me how to live in America. He taught me how to drive, and corrected my English.”

He had an original and wide-ranging mind—his own kind of brilliance. Although he was reserved, if you asked him the right question, he could suddenly become engaged and the topic would be discussed from every angle. In these conversations he was erudite on many subjects. A friend recalls that he would arrive at her door saying, “I’ve read the most interesting thing!,” and then talk about asteroids, or the geological formation of the ocean. He was very attracted to languages. Once at his lunch table at Apollo d’Oro he startled everyone by loudly imitating the vowel sounds of the Nepalese language.

With all his activities and accomplishments, James nevertheless led an almost monastic life at Apollo. He was a very private person who bore his sorrows privately. He rarely traveled; and showed how much can be gained by staying put. A friend recalls that if you wished to hear his thoughts you had to ask him, but the depth of his response was well worth the wait. And another friend said, “His devotion to the school and the teacher was quite wordless. He didn’t attend many events, but he was always so faithful and not

distracted by life. I think he had hardly any earthly possessions. James didn't have much of an instinctive element, except for his love of cookies."

In his last years James suffered from physical disabilities, which he bore without complaint. After suffering a stroke, he died as quietly and simply as he had lived.

James gave his final performance with the Apollo choir at the recent opera gala. It was a perfect illustration of his silent, consistent being. The choir was out on the Theatron stage, but James was not able to stand, and so he sang from the wings, sitting on a chair. The audience did not know he was there, but his voice joined and supported those of all the more visible singers.

He ended his time in the school as he began—invisibly supporting what he most loved. He knew how to stay small and grow large. He spoke little, but demonstrated through his actions what it means to serve in presence.

Dear James, you were much loved, perhaps more than you knew. We will miss you.

[**Music:** "Panis Angelicus" by Cesar Franck]
(Musicians: The Orfeo Chamber Choir]

[**Reading:** "Out of the Rolling Ocean the Crowd," by Walt Whitman]
(Reader: Mari Reeves)

Out of the rolling ocean the crowd came a drop gently to me,
Whispering, *I love you, before long I die,*
I have travell'd a long way merely to look on you to touch you,
For I could not die till I once look'd on you,
For I fear'd I might afterward lose you.

Now we have met, we have look'd, we are safe,
Return in peace to the ocean my love,

I too am part of that ocean, my love, we are not so much separated,
Behold the great rondure, the cohesion of all, how perfect!
But as for me, for you, the irresistible sea is to separate us,
As for an hour carrying us diverse, yet cannot carry us diverse forever;
Be not impatient – a little space – know you I salute the air, the ocean and
the land,
Every day at sundown for your dear sake, my love.

Minister's Conclusion:

The death of a friend reminds us that we each inhabit a fragile and temporary vessel, through which presence emerges and connects us.

May James' unceasing, unheralded labors in support of the school, his friends, and his teacher inspire us in our own efforts;

May his gentle yet uncompromising nature remind us to strive for the highest standards;

May his wordless devotion to the pursuit of presence increase our own valuation.

Dear James, we thank thee.

Minister:

The task of this lifetime has been fulfilled. The role of James is complete. The shell of the body falls away, and the soul that inhabited that body is released to continue its divine journey.

Candle Ceremony

Minister signals urn bearer.

Minister: Please stand.

Funeral party leaves.

At the Cemetery

Announcement (Bonnie):

After the interment, you are all invited to proceed to the gazebo to witness the raising of a glass to James.

Minister's Introduction:

Here in this sacred place, we gather to release James to his, and our, true home.

[Reading: From "Whispers of Heavenly Death" by Walt Whitman] (Reader: Patrick Stuart)

That music always round me, unceasing, unbeginning, yet long untaught I did not hear,
But now the chorus I hear and am elated,
A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health, with glad notes of daybreak I hear,
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of immense waves,
A transparent base shuddering under and through the universe,
The funeral wailings with sweet flutes and violins, all these I fill myself with,
I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I am moved by the exquisite meanings.
I do not think the performers know themselves – but now I think I begin to know them.

Minister:

We return James' ashes to the ground: from earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Words fade in the face of a great reality. We, too, arrive at this simplest of moments. And James is one of our friends who shows us how.

Urn is placed in the grave.

Minister scatters rose petals into the grave.

Minister's Conclusion:

The earth returns to the earth, and a divine spark returns to its divine source. The circle of life is complete. Let us witness the raising of a glass to James, and then depart, with a renewed and vivid appreciation for the gift of life allotted to each of us.

Minister leads attendees toward the gazebo for the toast.

[Toast: Grant Ramey and Graylin Ross]