

## Acceptance of the Distinguished Public Service Medal for 2004

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Mr. President, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

What a surprise and an honor to be singled out for the Distinguished Public Service Medal for 2004 by the Mineralogical Society of America! This year is indeed special, as it ushers in a new era of communication and collaboration among the major mineralogical and geochemical societies; witness the impressive inaugural issue of *Elements*, our common venture. The award of this medal to someone closely associated with the Mineralogical Association of Canada over the years sends the same signal, that the time has come to recognize each other's achievements much more so than in the past. We are all in this together! I thank sincerely the person who nominated me, the people who took the time to write letters on my behalf, the award-selection committee, and the MSA Council. I also thank John Hughes for his kind remarks; John represents very well the clients that I serve. The list of contributors to *The Canadian Mineralogist* is made up of approximately one-third Canadian, one-third American, and one-third "others." John also has served two terms as Associate Editor of *The Canadian Mineralogist*. In his six years of stellar service, he handled many articles. In every case, he has received a copy of my letter to the author(s), in which I communicate the results of the referees' evaluations and the Associate Editor's recommendation to me. Some of those letters are actually quite difficult to write, as you might imagine. It is there that he was able to get to know me; when we eventually met, at the IMA meeting in Toronto in 1998, he blurted out: "You actually exist!"

It is customary to thank people along the way who were instrumental in one's development. I shall single out two individuals who helped me in different ways to become a good editor. The first is my father who, in his young days, was a teacher at the high school level. I remember well being given spot quizzes on anything and everything, from "What is the plural of ox? And of deer? And how would you spell that? When he graduated from Teacher's College, he was told: "Teach for one year, and you are good for nothing. Teach for five years, and you are good for nothing else." As I was contemplating a position in academia, he repeated the same pearl of wisdom to me. The advice might well apply to an incoming editor of a scientific journal, but the time scale would have to be different. "Edit for five years, and you are good for nothing. Edit for ten years, and you are good for nothing else." But I really don't believe the second part, because editing has made me better in many other areas of activity. I should note that this serene man passed away eight years ago at age 98. My mother, who will turn 98 before this text is published, still writes me two-page letters to tell me what she is up to and to inquire about how her wayward son is doing. Thus I am told that I have the genetic baggage to continue serving the community for a little while longer.

The second person to recognize is Joseph D.H. Donnay, a consummate editor and another perfect role model. Jose came



to McGill University in September 1970, as I did. He had just retired from The Johns Hopkins University, and came to Montreal because his wife Gabrielle, like me, was starting a teaching career there. He called himself "fellow by matrimony." When I began this awesome task of editing the journal, he offered his time and talents to help me out in many ways, in particular in linguistic and grammatical matters. I would ask him a question about a difficult excerpt of someone's text, and the next day, I could expect his recommended solution on a small slip of paper. I have kept and consulted these on occasion. Which word should be used to convey what the author really meant to say? Where do I place those pesky hyphens that the author neglected to include? I normally translated an author's abstract into French (a requirement of the granting agency). I would give him my best effort; what could he quibble with this time, I thought to myself.... Back came the text with many corrections in blue pencil, not only to my French translation, but to the author's abstract (I never gave him the full text, so the abstract really had to stand on its own as an informative summary). Jose fully believed that Belgians are entrusted with conserving the purity of the French language. If a French author supplied the French version of the accompanying abstract, he would delight in going over it, and would point out all the transgressions to me. But amazingly he

was equally thorough and meticulous in the correct usage of the English language.

To this day, when I annotate (*aka* “martinize”) an author’s text, I am strongly influenced by Jose’s insistence on precision in language and logical development of ideas. After all, the author is conveying high-precision scientific results; how can he or she ever hope to succeed if the text is low-precision prose? Here is an example I encountered recently: “The analyses given in Table 1 are the average result of all the analyses made in each section.” Sloppy usage, imprecise or incorrect terminology (in the nomenclature of minerals, for example), improper use of punctuation, and hyphenless prose are not apt to do those results justice. An editor is meant to edit. As least, that is what Jose taught me.

I remember Louis Cabri and John Jambor, my predecessors at the helm, inviting me to Ottawa in the summer of 1977 to make me an interesting proposition. They would not say what they had in mind over the phone. Little did I know what I was getting into when, completely awed at the prospect of editing a mainline journal, I said that I would give it a try, starting with volume 16. Well, here I am with volume 43, still at it, and enjoying myself while helping others. In the intervening years, my knowledge of the five fields covered by the journal has both broadened and deepened incredibly. I now publish articles of my own in fields that I would never have imagined possible early on in my career. Editing has without doubt also exerted a positive influence on the quality of my teaching.

I remember a chance meeting once with a full-time editor working for Elsevier, or was it Springer-Verlag? It doesn’t matter. When I told him that we had something in common, he launched into a diatribe on how academics should stick to doing research, and leave the editing to professionals like him. Well, I beg to differ. An academic who has done research (and still does, as time permits) has a unique insight into what really is going on, be it in the design of proper pseudosections with which to work out  $P$ - $T$ - $t$  paths in metamorphic terranes, or in the solution of the challenging structure of a newly found sulfosalt, or in the hydrothermal transfer of elements in an epithermal deposit, or in the possible mechanisms of contamination in “dirty” granites and granitic pegmatites. The “academic” editor can read the paper once refereed, and come up with perceptive key questions that may have been missed in the review process, thus ensuring an improved final product. The interaction of an “academic” editor with an author thus goes on at a level that is totally beyond reach of an editor working for a profit-motivated publisher. The quality of editing thus tends to be better in society-run journals. They are run on the concept that individuals give freely of their time and resources to help others. There, I have given you reasons why you should send your better articles to society-run journals.

I am here today because of the consistent dedication of thousands of referees over the years and dozens of Associate Editors around the world, who gave of their time and resources to help me produce a quality product six times each year. I salute them, and thank them all for their contributions. One individual merits special thanks, however. Vicki Loschiavo, Managing Editor and my soulmate, keeps me sane and helps me in many ways to make it all happen. Vicki, whose day job is Area Personnel Officer at McGill University, is called upon to deal with difficult, “high-maintenance” employees on occasion. The terminology has now

slipped into our editorial activities, as we do have our fair share of “high-maintenance” authors. I understand that the concept is being adopted forthwith in the *American Mineralogist* system.

One trend in textbook publishing in our field has me quite worried about the future. Let’s say that I want to publish a textbook on the *Origin of Carbonatites*, or whatever. In 2005, a major publisher might look at my proposal with interest, and say “This proposal looks terrific. We might well be interested in publishing your 600-page advanced-level textbook, but sorry, you are on your own to give us camera-ready copy. We will not help you with the layout, the illustrations, which, incidentally will be in black-and-white and preferably the size of a large stamp, and sorry, we cannot help you with the editing. Were you writing an introductory-level text or an encyclopedia, or were you publishing in the field of Genomics, Proteomics, Genetic Engineering, Biochemistry, Oncology, etc., you would of course have full access to our team of graphic artists, typographers and editors. Here, because we anticipate rather limited sales, you are completely on your own to produce the book. We will not look at your text once submitted, but if there is anything that we don’t like in your artwork or your tables, we will redo the offending items.... at your expense.” I am inventing nothing here! The hard reality, in my opinion, is that in our field, authors will increasingly turn to societies like ours to publish their textbooks, because only there will they find the proper assistance in editorial and related matters. I see it happening. I consider a textbook at an advanced level also to require an editor’s eagle eye, and even more so than a journal, I would say. Our societies thus will need yet a greater pool of editorial talent in the near future! If invited, try it! You will get a great feeling that you are helping someone present his or her exciting findings in the best possible light, with all the positive fallout that that may have on the author’s career development, for example.

How does an editor unwind? In my case, I engage in choral singing, and I see many parallels between that sphere of cultural activity and editing *The Canadian Mineralogist*. Let me explain. I sing in an excellent amateur choir in Montreal. Three or four times in a regular season, year after year, our amateur choir gets blended in with professional singers (in the ratio 2:1 or so) for the presentation of choral blockbusters by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. The chorus master gets the troops ready, obviously spends more time with the amateurs, but by the end of the rehearsal period, every member of the 160-strong MSO chorus is fully expected to perform at a professional level. The maestro for the occasion, who operates on the world scene, arrives a mere three or four days before the concert, just long enough to get over the jet lag, and immediately expects performances from the orchestra and chorus at a top-notch level. Whoever the maestro happens to be, I never cease to be amazed at how passionate that person is in a relentless quest for perfection. The conductor will immediately insist on quality, precision, accuracy, sensibility, diction, and total involvement from all participants, singers and instrumentalists alike, so that on the night of performance, a maximum of four days later, perfection is approached and the wishes of the composer will have been respected. These world-class high-price conductors are the catalyst, the ones who make it all come together in an amazingly short period of time. Then there is thunderous applause on performance night if everything

has come together well. Once the euphoria has died down, the maestro packs up and starts all over again elsewhere, with different participants and different selections from the repertoire, but with the same insistence on quality and the same relentless quest for perfection.

In producing a society-run international journal, the editor-in-chief works in isolation, on the metro, in the restaurant, or at home. The manuscripts come to him from all over, and he must work quickly, because the next day, there will be more. He is there from the beginning, coaches patiently, is ready to spend more time with first-time authors and those whose knowledge

of English is rudimentary, works for 25 céntimos an hour (I am orchestrating the journal from Europe this year), but he expects the same commitment to excellence from all participants in the process as the maestro, so that it can all come together on time. Two months down the line, another issue has to hit the newsstands! There is no thunderous applause, but there is the odd word of appreciation in an Acknowledgements section of an article or in a letter. Then an event like this one occurs. Yes, I do hear the thunderous applause! I am deeply honored and most grateful to be designated the MSA's Distinguished Public Service Medalist for 2004.