

# My Four Years As Editor

**Halford Ryan**

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When I assumed the editorship of the *National Forensic Journal* in 1995, the journal had not been published since volume 10, number 2, Fall, 1992, although a volume 11, number 2, Winter, 1994, somehow appeared out of nowhere. Naturally, the state of the journal was enervated, and I had the modest goal of once again returning the journal to some semblance of an orderly schedule of publication.

This goal could not have been accomplished without the considerable help of the members of the editorial board. I thank them for their help service and assistance, and the association owes them a debt of gratitude for their professionalism. Contributors to this journal know, and the membership should realize, that the readers turned around the essays in a timely fashion that would make other journals jealous.

Happily, a backlog of articles had apparently accrued in the absence of the journal's being published, for the editor and readers received numerous essays during the first two years of 1996-97. Volumes 14 and 15 published eighteen refereed articles and three book reviews. Then, essays ceased to be submitted in 1998-99, except for those in this issue. The present issue should really be volume 16, number 1, Spring, 1998, but it is combined with a non-existent number 2, Fall, 1998, in order to catch-up a belated schedule. The present volume is late because I did not have enough essays until now to publish an issue. The 1999 issues, if any appear, will be considerably late, and under a new editor.

Readers of this journal may be interested to learn how the editor selected articles. I sent them to three critics. The readers checked one of three categories: accept, accept with revisions, or reject. Almost none of the essays were accepted as they were originally presented, and very few submissions were rejected outright. Most of the articles were accepted on a 2-1 vote, but almost all of the rejections were based on a

3-0 vote. The editor on two occasions accepted essays that were not reviewed, but in the editor's opinion merited publication. Thus, potential contributors faced a favorable prospect in having their essays accepted for publication, and all book reviews were published.

The forensic community should know that the editorial board—especially several members who were strongly interested in raising the level of style and diction in the journal—and the editor encountered many essays that were not satisfactorily composed. This fact exacerbated the readers' and editor's work, for many professionals in forensics do not write well. The flagrant faults that the readers and I found over the years were legion. Numerous contributors, almost all of whom held Ph.D. degrees, routinely made egregious errors in English composition. These mistakes included a lack of agreement in singular/plural nouns with singular/plural verbs; needless and numerous changes in tenses between past and present verbs; nouns used as adjectives and nouns used as verbs; and all kinds of violence to the English sentence—incomplete sentences without a subject or a verb, dangling participles, the misuse of commas and semicolons; and so-called sentences that defied description.

Editorial preferences are not necessarily a contributor's error, but the following habits are not generally conceived as an appropriate scholarly style: a compulsion to begin many sentences with "There," such as "There is no reason to begin a sentence with there"; passive verb constructions that enervate a writer's style; inflated previews of points to be made and summaries of points just made; and the use of contractions, such as "One shouldn't use contractions in scholarly writing." Although the following convention is not universally accepted, the noun is "forensics" and the adjective is "forensic."

The National Forensic Association paid for the printing and mailing of the journal, and Washington and Lee University supplied the incidental postage for mailing out copies for review and for returning the edited essays to the authors whose work was accepted.

Readers and contributors should be aware of the editor's work in preparing the journal for the printers. The preparation from disk to

camera-ready format is tedious and time consuming. The camera-ready pages have to be formatted for photographic reproduction. Since I had no secretarial help of any kind, *I* had to remove all superfluous commands, change underlining to italics, adjust the margins, change the fonts, etc.

A basic fact of a journal's life is that the editor cannot publish essays that are not submitted. The paucity of scholarly forensic articles, particularly at a time when one hears laments about the circumstances of coaches and directors of forensics with regard to promotion and tenure, is troubling. Scholarly writing has always been a requisite for respect in academia. Folks in forensics cannot expect their non-forensic colleagues to take them seriously if they do not take themselves seriously enough to publish.