

Special Section: In Honor of James Emmett Birren (1918-2016)

Because of Jim

Patricia McDonald

I am grateful to Jim for accepting me into the psychology program at USC. Me? I was changing majors from a Ph.D. in literature to psychology. What did Jim do? Point to an empty wall in his office and ask me, "If I was referring to my life, how big would my painting be? What would my painting be?"

I always loved solving puzzles. Jim gave me the opportunity to do that with the scientific method. Better than a crossword puzzle! The scientific method gives more to healing. I struggle to be empathic, knowing I may never get there, because I don't understand the conflicts between science and faith, helping and seeking knowledge. They are not conflicts for me.

When I was at the Bekhterev Psychoneurological Institute, I met the woman physician in charge of caring for

geriatric patients. Many of their injuries were from the Second World War; she understood that Alzheimer's was not the only neurological condition she was treating. I gave her two books, one by Dr. James E. Birren and one, *Counseling the Older Adult: A Training Manual in Clinical Gerontology*, by me. My book was written, inspired by my mentor, Jim Birren. I wanted to give both to her. She had a bust of Lenin on her desk. I had an accurate translator that day, so I asked her why Lenin was still there. She simply said, "Without him, I would not be here." The same was true for me of Jim Birren. Without Dr. Birren (whom I never called Jim for many decades), I would not be here.

It is with love and gratitude that I dedicate these contributions to Dr. James E. Birren.

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