

E. Ray Nichols, Jr.

1914 - 1993

PROFESSOR OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION, EMERITUS

B.A., University of Redlands; M.A., Cornell University; Ph.D., Speech,
University of Southern California, June 12, 1948
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1966 To June 5, 1977
Birth: October 8, 1914; Death: April 23, 1993

On the occasion of his retirement dinner in 1977 Ray Nichols was honored by all his colleagues, but one tribute stands out in my mind. Martin Andersen, himself a distinguished emeritus, rose to address the assembly with some startling words of remembrance of the contributions of Ray Nichols to the Department of Speech Communication and the university. While Martin allowed that Ray was a splendid colleague, he told us that Ray was also "irritating." To the now hushed assembly, Martin went on to tell us many of the irritating things that he had experienced over the years as Ray's friend. They included always being on time, being earnest and hardworking, dependable, intelligent, determined, creative, etc. The presentation was a rousing success and received a standing ovation because it was clear that Ray had so many endearing qualities, not the least of which was his quiet humility, and Martin had captured just the right tone of tribute to help us honor him without embarrassing this quiet man.

Egbert Ray Nichols, Jr. was the son of a famous debate coach and scholar who was a Professor and Chair of the Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Redlands. The senior Nichols was a well published author and a Fulbright Scholar who took the family to live in Japan where he fulfilled his duties of teaching Japanese university students the art of western style debate. This early educational experience would have profound influence on Ray's later contributions to the field of international education. Writing, drama, track and field and forensics dominated Ray's high school years before enrolling at Redlands as an English and Speech major. The "professor's son" met and courted Marion before leaving for Cornell University where he finished his Master's Degree in 1937. A year's teaching at the University of Wyoming would engender a love of cowboy boots that would be part of Ray's persona for years to come. In 1938 Ray married Marion and began work on his doctorate at the University of Southern California while also working at Stockton Junior College.

Ray commenced work on his dissertation in the Fall of 1941 and was quickly transformed from a reserve ensign to active duty as a communications specialist in the Navy from 1942-1947. He served in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C.; at the 13th Naval District in Bremerton, Washington; in Pearl Harbor; and with the army and navy Joint Communications Staff on Guam. While stationed in Washington D.C. , Marion helped out on dissertation tasks by copying

materials at the Congressional Library where Ray would meet her after duty hours to review speeches and correspondence of Senator Hiram Johnson, who was the subject of his dissertation. From 1951-69 Lt. Commander Nichols served as a Specialist in Communications with the Naval Reserve Officers School at the University of Southern California.

After serving three years as an assistant professor of speech and drama at the University of Oregon, Ray accepted an associate professor position at Whittier College in 1950 teaching courses in speech and drama and serving as the Director of the Whittier College Theatre. Over the next ten years Ray directed sixteen full length plays at the college, was promoted to full professor and department chair, and also initiated the Bird Cage Theatre at Knott's Berry Farm where he directed the first season of productions. He joined a group of colleagues who were interested in international education and began serious discussions about a truly unique form of university education. Out of these discussions Ray was selected to initiate, plan, and bring to fruition a new educational adventure to be known as the University of the Seven Seas

From 1961-65 Ray served as President of the University of the Seven Seas and initiated educational and curricular planning, negotiated with business and shipping companies, made contacts with educators from numerous nations, recruited students, and hired faculty for this unique international educational experience. Among the honors bestowed upon him for his leadership in these endeavors were special citations from the Prime Minister of Malaysia; the Mayor of Yokohama, Japan; Ministers of Education from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Egypt, South Vietnam, Ceylon, India, Portugal, Spain, and Greece; the mayors of New York and San Diego and the County Supervisors of Los Angeles. The most memorable of these presentations was a public presentation of his award of honor by Madame Chiang Kai Shek in Taipei in 1963. The program had become an international success and mergers were being discussed with other universities that had interests in internationalizing their curriculum and mode of study.

In 1966 Ray joined the faculty at California State University, Fullerton and assumed duties as director of the basic courses and later served as Vice Chair of the Department of Speech Communication. He taught a variety of speech communication courses, but his special favorite was classical Rhetorical Theory. In addition to reading the Greek and Roman classics on rhetoric and poetics, students of Dr. Nichols were treated to field trips to the Getty Museum. With a cowboy booted foot propped on a chair, the class would hear Ray read from the words of Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian. He would describe the ancient ports along the Ionian, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas. He would illustrate the parallels and departures of rhetorical and dramatic theories and sprinkle his lectures with scenes from ancient Greek and Roman plays and theatrical characters.

After retiring in 1977 from teaching, Ray joined with Leo Shapiro and others in founding Continuing Learning Experience (CLE), an association of

persons interested in lifelong learning. He was active in the association until he and Marion moved to White Sands in La Jolla. He devoted hours to writing and produced four historical works in fiction set in the post-christ Roman empire. According to the publisher of his most recent novel, his heroine is "Marianne, the beautiful granddaughter of Cleopatra, and sister of Herod II, King of Judea, who falls in love with a Roman engineer, Maurius. She jilts Eleazar, the leader of the Jewish rebellion against Rome...who vows to destroy them."

When Martin Andersen talked of Ray's qualities at that retirement dinner he did not mention his most defining characteristic; he had the soul of a romantic. Yet, surely the evidence is overwhelming, especially to those who knew him well; who else but a romantic, would have sailed the seas as a boy, man, and scholar; named his daughter Marina and cast his wife as the prototype of the granddaughter of Cleopatra, tutored students in the classics wearing cowboy boots, and had a boyhood friend travel to the United States from Japan to place flowers on his grave and bestow on his wife a token of his respect for this quiet man.

Submitted by
Joyce M. Flocken
Professor of Speech Communication
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