

ALBERT ELLIS (1913–2007)



Legendary psychologist and early member of our Division Albert Ellis passed away July 24, 2007, at 93 years of age. He changed the world of therapy profoundly. Creator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and author of dozens of books and hundreds of articles, he was when alive probably the best known psychologist worldwide, having pioneered a cognitive approach to therapy and written in scholarly, professional, as well as popular venues to worldwide audiences. In his long-time hometown New York City, his famous Friday night sessions at the Albert Ellis Institute, open to the public, were a fixture for decades. He was also prominent in the media, a media psychologist, appearing on TV or radio, and being written about or interviewed in major magazines and newspapers.

At APA Conventions I did annual Conversation Hours with Al, Aaron T. Beck and myself for many years. When Al was unable to travel to APA for health reasons, he joined us by speakerphone. These great sessions were always standing room only (SRO). Another recurring session that I put together at several recent APA Conventions, sponsored by Division 46, was the “APA Comedy Jam,” also SRO sessions in which Al was always the lead-off speaker, singing with the audience his famous therapy songs, which he had written using the music from well-known tunes of the American popular songbook.

Another highlight for me was the regular trips my doctoral class and I took each semester, when possible, to visit with Al at his Institute in New York. He was ever gracious and giving with the students, interacting with them for one-and-a-half to two hours in his office, laughing with them over their and his own impromptu renditions of some of his songs, posing for group photos, then signing any books or materials they had brought along, providing them indelible memories of this brilliant, creative man.

I’ve had so many wonderful experiences with Al at APA, as I’m sure many of you have also. Whenever I asked him to contribute to the program he always said yes. No special requirements, no strings, no hesitation, just a willingness to talk about his favorite subject—psychology—and interact with psychologists. I have never organized a session at APA with Al in which there were any empty seats in the room.

Al was a true original, unique, unusual, outspoken, with a no-nonsense approach to therapy and life, blunt, direct, famed for his colorful language, and by the faces of high enjoyment I have seen in the audiences of all these APA sessions over the years, I would have nominated him as our profession’s most popular psychologist!

We’ll not see his like again. He was my friend, and I will miss him always.

Al is survived by his widow, Debbie Joffe Ellis. Their time together was a great love story for the final years of his life.

Frank Farley
President-Elect, Division 46