

# In Memoriam: Ralph Charles Serin

*In November 2023, the field of corrections lost a highly influential and important friend. Ralph Serin passed away on Tuesday, November 7, 2023. Ralph is well known for his insight, depth of understanding, patience, sense of humor, passion for educating students and practitioners, and developing new (and pragmatic) technologies for use in correctional settings. He was a dear friend and mentor to many of us in the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services System. He has contributed immensely to our collective knowledge and practices. While he will be missed by so many, his legacy will have impacts for decades to come. A full tribute, prepared by his family and friends, is reprinted below.*

## A Tribute to Ralph Charles Serin, March 6, 1953–November 7, 2023

**RALPH SERIN WAS** a devoted family man, caring friend, generous mentor, and researcher. He left us too soon on November 7, 2023, after a quiet battle with cancer during which he chose to focus on his family and the legacy of his work, rather than on his illness. Ralph was born in Lancashire, England to Hazel Jenkinson and Peter Serin, immigrating to Canada at the age of four. He was a loving brother to Chris and shared a special bond with his twin Roger (Janice), to whom he humbly came in second in provincial cross-country races for his entire high school career.

Ralph completed his undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies, all at Queen's University, where he met his loving wife, Carolan, who worked at the Queen's Pub. Together, they loved to travel anywhere with good food, but his favorite was France where he had fond memories of evenings in Paris and bike trips with their close friends John and Debbie. Ralph and Carolan raised their two daughters, Megan Ashlee (Brandon) and Avely in Kingston and later moved to Ottawa



to be close to their three grandsons, Talan, Jarrett, and Kyler. Ralph was a regular at hockey games, a master of crazy eights and chess, the fixer of any toy that broke and the solver of any problem that arose. He loved spending time with his brother-in-law Rob (Colleen) and some of his best memories were at the family cottage that was shared with his brother- and sister-in-law, Brian, and Catherine, and their two girls, Shannon (Matt) and Nevada (Ryan). For fifteen years he spent every summer weekend trying to keep snakes off the beach, playing board

games, watching lip sync performances, and enjoying early morning coffees and a good mystery novel by the water. As a father, Ralph was tremendously proud of his daughters – he loved watching Avely play basketball and discussing all things NBA, taught Megan Ashlee to tackle home improvement projects and was known to spend hours researching the safest snow tires. When at home, Ralph found joy in woodworking, customizing their house with enthusiasm, in travelling to auctions and restoring antiques, and in making jewelry for those he loved. Later in life, Ralph participated in annual family vacations with his children and grandchildren, to Prince Edward Island where he was happy to participate in daily stops for ice cream and the occasional afternoon on the beach under a big umbrella. He loved his Sunday morning Starbucks date with Carolan, was meticulous about car maintenance, and enjoyed watching cooking shows. Ralph believed in working hard and truly felt that we each have the potential to accomplish even the hardest of goals.

Confucius is quoted as having said that if you choose a job you love, you will never have to work a day in your life. Ralph dedicated his life to the field of corrections and parole, to the support of research and evidence-based practices, and to communities across the world through the safe release of justice-involved persons; he truly loved his

<sup>1</sup> This tribute was prepared by Ralph's cherished daughters, Megan Ashlee Bowes (Serin) and Avely Serin, his loving wife, Carolan Serin, and with a little bit of background help from Ralph's long-time mentee, colleague, and friend, Shelley Brown. May the soothing melodies of Kenny G accompany you always, Ralph. Canadian obituaries released an earlier version of this tribute on Monday, Nov. 13, 2023.

work. Those who worked with Ralph will remember his wry sense of humor, his unfailing candor, his humility, and his dedication. After graduating with an Arts degree, Ralph landed a position at the Kingston Penitentiary working as a psychologist, which inspired him to further his studies. He went on to work for the Correctional Service of Canada in various capacities from 1975 to 2003, including as Director of Operations and Programs Research.

In 2003, Ralph became a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa Canada where he was known to be a hard marker and a passionate doctoral supervisor. While there, Ralph served as the Director of the Criminal Justice Decision Making Laboratory, where he successfully brought millions of dollars in funding to the university for his research on parole/probation decision-making and supervision, dynamic risk assessment, client change, programming, and crime desistance. Collectively, Ralph published over 160 articles, reports, textbooks, book chapters, and books contributing to scholarly and applied audiences. Ralph also presented at over 200 conferences worldwide. He served as a

devoted mentor for over 80 graduate and undergraduate students, many of whom later became collaborators, colleagues, and close friends. For 30 years Ralph also worked as the resident and on-call psychologist at the Brockville Jail, assessing and counselling incarcerated individuals who were at risk of self-harm. Ralph devoted considerable time to providing consultative and training services to various correctional, community-based, and paroling agencies in North America, Asia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. One of his final projects, closer to home, with the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General, will transform the way justice-impacted people are supervised in the community. Through his work, Ralph had numerous close personal friends, including Shelley Brown, Kirk Luther, Christopher Lowenkamp, and Danielle Rieger, who brought him tremendous comfort in his final days. Ralph believed strongly in karma and second chances and dedicated himself to the rehabilitation of others to contribute to public safety.

Shortly before his death, Ralph was honored to have a lifetime achievement award established in his name by the Association

of Paroling Authorities International and National Institute of Corrections – an “Oscar” for his dedicated service and expertise. Not only will Ralph’s legacy live on in his students who will continue to advance his work, but also through his impactful professional achievements. Ralph was most proud of the DRAOR (Dynamic Risk Assessment for Offender Re-entry), now used in multiple jurisdictions worldwide, and the Structured Decision-Making Framework. This framework was developed with close friend and former student and colleague Caleb Lloyd, and has been recognized as a best practice for paroling authorities by the National Institute of Corrections. The Structured Decision-Making Framework is currently being implemented in several jurisdictions across the world.

Ralph will be dearly missed, but forever remembered. Those who knew and loved him can attest that the world is a better place for his having lived. Should you wish, the family asks that a donation be made in Ralph’s name to the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) located in Ottawa, Canada or in support of a local youth hockey team.