



John "Jack" Gilhooley

June 26, 1938 - January 5, 2023

Playwright and educator John "Jack" Gilhooley, 84, died on January 5, 2023, in Sarasota, Florida, with his wife Jo Morello at his side. Jack had triumphed over serious health issues over the years, never complaining and always moving forward, until this last illness took him. Jack was born in Bala Cynwyd, PA, in 1938 and raised in Philadelphia and New York City, where he began his prolific playwriting career. Jack earned a B.S. from Syracuse University and master's degrees from both Villanova University and the University of Pennsylvania. He moved to Sarasota, Florida in 1988, where he met and married Jo Morello, a lifelong writer with previous theatrical production experience. Seeing an obvious fit, he encouraged her dramatic writing, gaining not just a life partner but also a sometime-writing partner and adding co-authored productions to their list of credits. Quoting T.S. Eliot, he generously called her "the better craftsman" but she insists the title is his.

Formerly a university professor, Jack switched to dramatic writing in the 1970s, beginning a career that saw American Theatre magazine once name him among the most produced American playwrights. His work included productions of almost 200 plays onstage, on air and online; 20 publications; and 75 fellowships, commissions, awards and honors. His plays were mounted nationally and internationally in over 130 venues, sometimes almost simultaneously, as with 1977 productions of Mummer's End at the Asolo State Theatre, the Folger, and the Shubert. His plays were also produced in Ireland,

the United Kingdom, Scotland, Spain, France, Canada, and Australia.

Jack's work was about more than numbers, however, as attested by his numerous honors, awards, and generous mentoring—sometimes hidden beneath his crusty exterior. This former university professor at Western Connecticut College and Drama Department Chair at Jersey City State College at one time secured funding and resources to send his students touring through New Jersey projects with the first theater presentations many youth had ever seen.

Theatre professionals acclaimed him. Ed Asner, who performed in two of Jack's plays, was one of his biggest fans, saying "I love this man's writing." Joseph Papp, who produced *The Time Trial* in 1975 (with Tommy Lee Jones) at his off-Broadway Public Theater, called the work "profoundly human...a mordant and unsparing work written without apology and, in an odd way, aimed directly at us." The NY Post's Marilyn Stasio, reviewing *Afternoons in Vegas*, cited Gilhooley's "infallible ear for real-life human speech" and said that "if the playwright were a camera, certain primitive tribes would surely ban him, for fear he would capture their souls." Of *Red Bessie*, co-authored with Dan Czitrom, Keith Miller of *The London Times* reviewed it as "clear-headed and humane, ... and more fun than might be expected of such a high-minded project."

He was awarded guest artist positions at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Sundance Playwrights' Lab, Avignon Festival, Ireland's Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Mount Holyoke College, Hawthornden Castle International Retreat (twice), and many others. The Fulbright Association sent him on full-semester professorships at Universidad de Salamanca, Spain, and National University of Ireland at Maynooth. A Canada Council Grant and NEA grant (his second) took him to the Centaur Theatre in Montreal, Canada. Jack was a member of New Dramatists, Dramatists Guild of America, Theatre Communications

Group, the James Joyce Society, the Fulbright Association, the Eugene O'Neill Society, and others. His publishers include Samuel French/Concord Theatricals, Broadway Play Publishing, Applause Books, Smith & Kraus, Palmetto Press, Meriwether Press.

Besides Jo, his wife of 33 years, Jack leaves step-grandchildren Dylan Zhang--"Spike" to Jack--(wife: Lindsay Zhang-Huba) of Albany, NY, and Katherine Zhang--"Trixie" to Jack--of Los Angeles; and his sister-in-law Patricia Gilhooley and nephews Scott and Christopher Gilhooley in California.

A Visitation to celebrate and share memories of Jack Gilhooley's Life will be held at Gendron Funeral Home on January 18, 2023 at 2p; followed by a service at 3p.

Resources:

Jack Gilhooley | Broadway Play Publishing Inc

<https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n83-165907/>

<https://www.lil-and-satchmo.com/creative-team>

<https://siestasand.us/featured-artist-3-14/>

<http://www.filmreference.com/film/65/Jack-Gilhooley.html>

Jack Gilhooley | Playwrights' Center (pwcenter.org)

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 18. 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ET)

Gendron Funeral & Cremation Services Inc. - Sarasota, FL

135 N. Lime Ave

Sarasota, FL 34237

(941) 365-1767

mike.gendronfuneralhome@msn.com

<https://www.gendronfuneralhome.com/contact-us/sarasota-fl-funeral-home>

Service

JAN 18. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Gendron Funeral & Cremation Services Inc. - Sarasota, FL

135 N. Lime Ave

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Tribute Wall



“ *John "Jack" Gilhooley*

October 09, 2023 at 02:01 AM



“ *John "Jack" Gilhooley*

January 28, 2023 at 12:09 PM



“ *Although Jack Gilhooley was passionately centered around all things theatre, we (Dick & I) met Jack and Jo at the movies. My deepest condolences, dear Jo, for the loss of your very best pal. As a family man and as a friend, he did it all, and did it so well. R.I.P. dear Jack*

Sue Morris - January 17, 2023 at 11:43 PM



“ *Sweet Tranquility Basket was purchased for the family of John "Jack" Gilhooley.*



January 17, 2023 at 03:08 PM

LJ

“ Over forty years, Jack and I stayed in touch--first as colleagues in the classroom, then as playwrights in the theater. Then as long distance commentators on the world via email. He was quick, sharp, and funny. I looked forward to every email, talked with him about life, aging, and well-being. Like all his friends, I miss him.

Lee Jacobus - January 17, 2023 at 12:36 PM

RS

“ The tough guy with a heart of gold - A most talented colleague, friend and partner in crime as I directed Jack's work - "The Kiss" in NYC at my Simon Studio and again at the Aspen Playwright's Conference 1985 - his wit could sting but you had to love it. He leaves a great legacy of theatre work and a great partner Jo Morello.- Roger Hendricks Simon

Roger Hendricks Simon - January 16, 2023 at 12:01 AM

JG

“*Dear Jack: I have every damn letter you ever sent me. I can't even remember when we first met - probably some playwright conference in New York before Broadway exiled its pimps and pin-ups –but at some point the letters started. Letters that made me howl with laughter, wanna incite a revolution, or just bang my head against a wall cause of how crazy-ass this world is! My God, your letters were brilliant, Jack – a masterful sabreur fencing barbed words in an art (letter-writing) quickly disappearing from our culture.*

I was always in awe of your take-no-prisoners' fierceness, your prolific writing chops, and that oh so scathing wit. But there was the other 'stuff' too – your laser-reading of my plays as they first fell out of my typewriter - and championing my work with the powers-that-be. I can never thank you enough for that support and generosity of time. I wondered if you felt you were living in the wrong age? I could see you throwing a few back around a table with the likes of Hammett, Hemingway, or Dorothy Parker – without a doubt, you would have held your own with that storied crowd.

Heh - you might want to go easy on the theatre angels when you meet up with them. Maybe start them out with your lighter fare, and then work into the harder plays as they get acclimated to the one-of-a-kind, kick-ass wit and wisdom that is Jack Gilhooley.

xoxo June

P.S. No mushy goodbyes cause I know that ain't your style – but I just got to say, I miss you, man.

June Guralnick - January 15, 2023 at 08:30 PM

GG

“ I knew Jack (and Jo) through my work with the Dramatists Guild. Jack and I had many passionate conversations about theatre, producers, writers. He cared about the theatre; he cared a lot about writers and he especially cared a lot about his beloved wife, Jo. What a long, distinguished career this man had. RIP, Jack.

Gary Garrison - January 13, 2023 at 04:38 PM

MK

“ As one of the first to hail Jack coming to Sarasota, I benefitted from his early praise and encouragement of my theater reviews. My husband Jim, who was a reader for Fulbright grants told Jack he'd be a perfect candidate for one and helped him and Jo with their Spanish to use in his first appointment, We became close friends of Jo and Jack since then and each of them, in turn, became my theater companions after Jim died. I missed him and his support of me as well as seeing and reading his plays so much in the last few years, but I kept communicating with him with cards and through emails to Jo. A day hasn't passed that they were not in my prayers. That will continue. God bless and keep them! MARIE J. KILKER

MARIE J. KILKER - January 13, 2023 at 10:47 AM

“ I met Jack Gilhooley in 1991 through a personal ad in the *Village Voice*: "Historian Seeks Playwright for Collaboration." His was by far the most interesting reply I received. I drove up to the Dorset Writing Colony in Vermont, where Jack was in residence, along with his wife Jo Morello. We talked about how we might dramatize an article I had recently published, on the life of Timothy D. "Big Tim" Sullivan, the legendary Tammany Hall boss of NYC's Lower East Side. We decided to focus on Big Tim and his unusual relationship with the young reformer Frances Perkins (later FDR's Secretary of Labor) in the wake of the disastrous 1911 Triangle fire. Mount Holyoke College, where I taught History for 41 years, brought Jack in as a visiting professor of theater, and in 1992 we produced "Big Tim and Fanny" at MHC's Rooke Theater, directed by Sue Lawless. After much re-writing and several staged readings, we produced a later version, "Triangle," at 59E59 Theaters in New York in 2011, the centennial year of the fire.

A second collaboration followed, "Red Bessie," based loosely on letters written by my family members who had served as volunteers in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). We brought the play to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2003, starring John where it received glowing reviews in the Scottish and English press.

Jack was a master at creating flesh and blood characters on stage, at using historical events and people to create moving drama, and at finding the humor, courage, and tragedy in human lives. We remained good friends and I treasured my visits with him and Jo. His body is gone but his memory and amazing body of work will live on.

"Ars longa, vita brevis"

Daniel Czitrom

*Professor of History on the Ford Foundation, Emeritus
Mount Holyoke College*

Daniel Czitrom - January 13, 2023 at 10:02 AM

ML

“ I remember the first time I met Jack. For some reason, I was outside the Tampa Bay Performing Art Center - now the Straz - and he walked up beside me and called me "Brother Leib." This from someone I'd never met! We got into a conversation and twenty years later we were still having that conversation. What a special, original, indispensable man!

Mark Leib - January 12, 2023 at 09:22 PM

DB

“ A talented writer and a rascalion with a twinkle in his eye - RIP Jack - it was an honor to have known you and privilege to have worked with you.

Damon Bonetti - January 12, 2023 at 08:05 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of John "Jack" Gilhooley.



January 12, 2023 at 03:33 PM

C"

“Fond memories of Jack as he directed me in two of his directing project plays at Syracuse back in the early 60's. A small department at the time which made us all very close. I still remember Jack discovering the playwright Arrabal. We had all heard of Ionesco, but only Jack knew of Arrabal. He proceeded to cast a unique group of novice actors, me being among them. He stood backstage as the faculty gathered to grade him and we began *Picnic on the Battlefield*. Well, as often happens, the leading man forgot his line and went absolutely blank. "I know perfectly well what it is all about..." rather than stop and wait for Jack to throw him the line the actor started over again "I know perfectly well..." Jack went crazy backstage. No one had a flashlight to get the actor to jump ahead to the next bit of dialogue. Jack began lighting matches but just as he got to the line the match went out. It was definitely a moment to remember.

Occasionally I met up with him in NYC and once when one of his plays was being produced at *Theatre By the Sea* in Portsmouth, NH. His wit is legendary. He will be remembered.

Carol "Shultze" - January 12, 2023 at 03:26 PM