



James Warren Gillett

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Professor James Warren Gillett possessed a passionate love of nature coupled with an equally passionate commitment to science and the best use of science in public policy decisions. He worked extremely hard, but to borrow Dickens' memorable phrase, in his long hours of involvement in the life of the university he was not "severely workful," for he was motivated by his insatiable curiosity, his love of learning, and an almost childlike delight in discovery. Those of us who knew him best found that in many ways he resembled the classic Greek and Roman ideal of the serious-merry man.

At the time of his retirement in 2006, a fellow professor in the Department of Natural Resources commented that having Jim Gillett as a colleague was like having an encyclopedia near at hand or ready access to Google. Time spent with Jim was always intellectually stimulating, and his broad range of interests contributed immensely to the pleasure of being in his company.

Jim liked to work with faculty colleagues across disciplines, and in his associations with Native Americans and other groups he demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity with respect to differing interests and cultural needs. But such sensitivity did not compromise Jim's insistence on getting the facts right nor lessen his aversion to what he regarded as junk science. His emphasis on the importance of risk assessment in formulating policy had a positive influence on other Cornell faculty, especially on those who worked in fields like resource policy and management and environmental ethics. For Jim, high-minded goals for the regulation of pesticides and environmental pollutants that were not constrained by the limits of first-rate science posed a serious threat to the credibility of the environmental movement and to the long-term health of the environment itself.

Jim was born in Kansas City, Kansas in 1933. In 1940 he contracted polio and was one of the first patients in the U.S. to receive treatment by the Sister Kenny method (hot compresses, vigorous daily massage, and tough exercise regimes) which contrasted sharply with the accepted practice of putting a child in braces with the resultant atrophy of muscles.

Educated in the Kansas City, Kansas public school system, Jim graduated from Mark Twain Grade School in 1947 in what may have been one of the most outstanding classes in the school's history. According to Jim over half eventually ended up with advanced degrees and/or became millionaires!

Environmental issues were important to Jim even as a young person. He became an avid bird watcher and an active Boy Scout and earned the God & Country Award in 1950 and his Eagle Scout badge in 1951. In 1965 he began working as an assistant soccer coach to the Oregon State Soccer club and over the next 20 years served as coach, teacher, and administrator during this period of Oregon's growing interest in the sport. At Cornell he coached the men's freshman soccer team.

In 1970 Jim married Mary Francis (Hebert) Goerz and with her had two sons, both of whom have served in the military—Grant Jameson (b. 1972) and Ian Michael (b. 1975). Jim also had two sons from an earlier marriage—John Stuart (b. 1963) and Peter Warren (b. 1964), and Mary has one son, Donald William (b. 1965) from her first marriage. Referring to Mary shortly after his retirement, Jim noted that in both Corvallis and Ithaca she was the pillar for all and sundry, being the room mother, den mother, and mother confessor for the boys and their friends, all this in spite of her courageous long-term battle with multiple sclerosis.

Jim graduated from the University of Kansas in 1955 with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry and from the University of California in 1962 with a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Dr. Gillett held teaching and research positions in agricultural chemistry at Oregon State University (1964-73), where he was promoted to Associate Professor. From 1973-1983 he was senior Terrestrial Ecologist and Environmental Scientist at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Ecology Research Laboratory in Corvallis, OR, where he made significant contributions to various methods for evaluating the safety of pesticides and toxic substances.

Jim came to Cornell in 1983 from the EPA to direct the Institute of Comparative and Environmental Toxicology, and he served as Full Professor in the Department of Natural Resources until his retirement in 2006. In 1992 Jim became the founding director of the Cornell Superfund and Basic Research Program. Professor Gillett brought a remarkable level of experience and enthusiasm to these initiatives.

Over the course of his career in science, Jim produced over 80 peer-reviewed publications, two books, and numerous reports. He chaired several national committees on environmental

issues and served a term on the President's Scientific Advisory Board for Biotechnology. He consulted for many groups, agencies, and corporations on a wide range of topics, as well as working pro bono for local communities faced with monumental clean-up issues.

Those students and colleagues who had the benefit of spending time with Professor Gillett whether in the classroom, in seminars, in the field, or elsewhere around the campus – know that he brought out the best scholarship and critical thinking in everyone who encountered him. He had a wealth of scholarly and practical knowledge, and could generously bring this to the table at just the right time to prompt both rich discussions and thoughtful decisions.

Jim became a major contributor to the distinguished legacy that the field of ecotoxicology maintains on the Cornell campus. He was an active participant in faculty and student matters across the campus and devoted considerable time to being a good steward of faculty governance. He was strongly committed to the education of under-represented Native American students in environmental toxicology, helping them acquire new knowledge and the tools necessary to better protect native lands and people from environmental health hazards.

Dr. James Gillett was an inspiration to so many of us on the Cornell faculty. When we look to role models for scholarship, work enthusiasm, kindness of heart and visionary ideas, James Gillett is among Cornell's finest.

Richard A. Baer, Jr., Chairperson; Rodney R. Dietert, Joseph B. Yavitt