

James E. Lawrence

June 6, 1926 — February 5, 2002

Over his lifetime, James E. Lawrence had these significant professional interests: teaching and advising Cornell University students; improving the environment of his beloved Catskills; and writing, publishing, and producing educational radio and television programs.

Jim was born in Kingston, New York on the Hudson River, started high school there but left to join the U.S. Navy in 1943 to be trained as a torpedo specialist. He received a medical discharge in 1945, returned to Kingston High School, and was graduated in 1946. His Cornell education began that year as a special two-year student in Wildlife Management. Based on this experience, he decided to complete a four-year program with a major in the same subject and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1950. That same year, on July 15, he married Joan E. Deegan.

The New York State Conservation Department hired him as Assistant Game Manager for the Lower Hudson District which ran on both sides of the Hudson from Ulster and Dutchess Counties down the river and out to the end of Long Island. Jim was assigned to census the deer herd on Long island, which was raising havoc with farmers' crops. They were also jumping the 12-foot fence at Brookhaven Laboratory to eat the radioactive plants.

He returned to the Poughkeepsie office of the Conservation Department to educate sportsmen about the need for managing the deer herd, building wildlife marshes, and protecting the environment. Part of this effort involved a weekly series of articles for the Woodstock, New York newspaper that brought the changing outdoor scene to the attention of local people with emphasis on protecting the environment.

In June 1953, Jim was appointed Executive Director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association in Pennington, New Jersey. Again, environmental education was his principal emphasis with the goal of raising public awareness of the need for land and water management.

In late 1954, Jim became the first Community Resource Development Extension Agent in New York State serving a rural non-farm audience with headquarters in Binghamton (Broome County). At that time, many hill farms in the Southern Tier were being abandoned by farmers and purchased by people who didn't need or necessarily want to farm for a living. He held workshops using his knowledge and that of Extension Specialists at Cornell to inform these new residents about farm ponds, Christmas trees, wildlife marshes, and land and water conservation.

Recognizing the need for educational material on these and other subjects, he produced several publications

and radio and television programs. He wrote and published a book, *Growing and Selling Christmas Trees*, and submitted articles to national magazines, local newspapers, and *The New York Times*. He was selected to become a member of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Natural Resources and wrote several reports for the committee.

With a strong background in communication and extension work, Jim came to Cornell on October 1, 1958 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Extension Teaching and Information (now divided into the Office of Media and Technology Services and the Department of Communication). Innovations in the department's radio and television operations and its academic courses in those media became evident a short time after his arrival. Also, he gave television-programming assistance to 125 agricultural, home economics, and 4-H Extension Agents who participated in live programs throughout New York State with an estimated weekly audience of more than one million persons. Evidence of his ability and leadership in the development of successful TV "short courses" was reported by many Cornell Extension specialists, including this letter from Dr. L.C. Cunningham, Agricultural Economist:

"I welcome an opportunity to describe the work of James Lawrence in connection with our 'short course' programs telecast over WNBF-TV Binghamton, WBEN-TV Buffalo, and WTEN-TV Troy. These programs, with an enrollment of approximately 2,500 farmers, were based on information obtained from the series of regional farm management studies of dairy farms in New York State. I had no experience in the use of this medium, and to have the guidance of a person trained in this area and with TV experience was most helpful. Admittedly, I am very much in the amateur class, so Lawrence not only helped to avoid a beginner's errors but also made many constructive suggestions in the preparation and presentation of the subject matter. Also, one of his major contributions was to make the telecasts a matter of teamwork between the specialist and agricultural agents from 10 counties."

To complement the actual production of radio and TV programs, Jim prepared a quarterly training newsletter "Video Views" for Cooperative Extension staff members and a publication titled, "Television and the Communication Process as Related to the Extension Program." Both received wide recognition in New York and other states and earned awards of excellence from the American Association of Agricultural College Editors.

During the 1964-65 academic year, Lawrence attended Syracuse University and received a Master's degree in Communications. The following year, he was promoted to Associate Professor at Cornell. In addition to teaching several courses, he became faculty advisor to several student organizations, including *Cornell Countryman* magazine, Agriculture Positive Action Council (AgPAC), and the Cornell Radio Guild where he soon became involved in programming for the students' independent radio station WVBR-FM (Voice of the Big Red).

While at Cornell, he founded his own business, "Outdoor Publications". He wrote and published books and maps of the Catskills and Adirondack regions. These maps show fishing areas, state lands, and other information useful to hunters, fishermen, hikers, and visitors to these areas.

When he retired from the university on May 31, 1983, he did not slow down but expanded his business and continued his lifelong commitment to environmental education. He worked behind the scenes with local groups, legislators, and others to see that the local and global environment was protected. He continued his writing on these subjects and often contributed articles and letters to local Catskill newspapers. Many people in the region have said he is sorely missed because his writing gave clarity to local controversies and made them think about and do the right thing for the area.

In retirement, Jim and Joan spent "summers" (April to November) at their summer home in Mt. Tremper. He considered the Catskills "The Center of the Earth" and was never happier than when he was there.

He was a member of several organizations, including Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and American Legion Post #150 of Phoenicia, New York. He also was a communicant at Immaculate Conception Church in Ithaca, New York.

James E. Lawrence died suddenly on February 5, 2002, at his home in Ithaca. Besides his wife of 51 years, Joan Deegan Lawrence, survivors include five daughters and two sons: Joyce Lawrence, Ithaca; Jill Lawrence, Oakland, California; Janet Hawkes, Ithaca; Jean Rightmire, Dryden; Jane Cullings, Newfield; James Lawrence, Newfield; and John Lawrence, Seattle, Washington; and five grandchildren.

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