

James N. Spencer

March 20, 2021

James N. Spencer, 79, died at The Glen at Willow Valley Communities on Saturday, March 20, 2021 with his wife, “Kat” holding his hand. He had suffered from Alzheimer’s disease for over 7 years. Born in Rainelle, WV, he was the son of the late Harold Lester Spencer, Sr. and the late Thelma Kessler Spencer.

He grew up in rural West Virginia, where his proudest moment was quarterbacking the state-championship high school football team—a squad so small it couldn’t muster a scrimmage. He earned a B.S. in chemistry from Marshall University and a Ph.D. from Iowa State. He served on the faculty at Lebanon Valley College for 13 years before moving to Franklin & Marshall College, in Lancaster, PA, where he taught from 1980 until 2007 and was awarded the highest honors that the college bestows in both teaching and research.

Jim was a key force in the early development of a teaching methodology that deemphasized the lecture and, as a result, most students remain awake. Called POGIL (process-oriented guided inquiry learning) it is now a 501 C-3 organization dedicated to improving teaching and learning. It is an approach designed to improve content mastery while also helping students to develop life and learning skills. Jim was also a generous mentor to generations of undergraduate research students and to faculty colleagues across the

country. His research led to more than 100 publications, the vast majority with undergraduate co-authors.

He was one of only a handful of chemists to receive more than one national award from the American Chemical Society (ACS), earning the 1999 Award for Research at an Undergraduate Institution and the 2005 George C. Pimentel Award in Chemical Education for his work in reforming the college chemistry curriculum. He was an ACS Fellow and, in 2015, along with two colleagues, earned the James Flack Norris Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Teaching of Chemistry.

Jim's students described their interactions with him as a perfect mixture of mentoring and partnership, and also as very productive and enlightening experiences. His colleagues uniformly marveled at his passionate commitment to teaching, learning, and research, which he saw as inextricably intertwined.

Before the onset of Alzheimer's disease, he could, among other feats, quote from memory hundreds of lines of Shakespeare. He read voraciously in American history and collected, within the constraints of a professor's salary, 17th and 18th-century English and American furniture and decorative arts. His collection of English apothecary jars resides at the Yale University Center for British Art.

He was an avid fan of Penn State football and of the Philadelphia Eagles.

He is survived by his wife of 37 years, Kathleen, a nephew, John Spencer (Fairmont, WV), sister-in-law, Mary Eleanor Spencer (Lutz, FL), sister-and brother-in-law, Patricia and Michael Hall (West Chester, PA), nephew, Matthew Hall, his wife Caryl and children Martha and Edward, (Carlsbad, CA), and niece, Catherine Hall (Media, PA). He was also blessed with the

friendship of Scott and Giovanna Lerner (Lancaster, PA) and their two children, Miriam and Daniele.

Kat wishes to express her heartfelt thanks to the team members on the second floor of the Glen for their devoted, loving, and professional care of Jim for almost 4 years.

A Rite of Holy Burial will be held on Saturday, May 15, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. St. James Episcopal Church, 119 N. Duke Street, Lancaster, PA 17602. The visitation will begin at 9:30 a.m. Masks are required.

A recording of the funeral service will be available later Saturday afternoon, please visit <https://client.tribucast.com/tcid/2403736103>

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to The POGIL Project, P.O. Box 3003, Lancaster, PA 17604-3003 and/or Mathias J. Brunner Nursing Education Fund, Willow Valley Communities, 1000 Willow Valley Lakes Drive, Willow Street, PA 17584.

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 15. 9:20 AM - 10:30 AM (ET)

St. James Episcopal Church
119 N. Duke Street
Lancaster, PA 17603

Burial

MAY 15. 10:30 AM (ET)

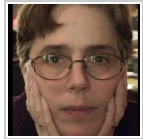
St. James Episcopal Church
119 N. Duke Street
Lancaster, PA 17603

Tribute Wall



“ *James N. Spencer*

October 22, 2023 at 11:34 PM



“ *Dear Kathy:*

I just received the email from Cameron. So sorry to hear about Jim. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

-- Virginia Maksymowicz and Blaise Tobia

Virginia Maksymowicz - March 29, 2021 at 05:54 PM



“ *Dear Kathy,*

Please accept my condolences on the lost of your partner. Bruce and I enjoyed Jim's kind smiles and greetings on the occasions we saw each other at Central Market. Keeping you in heart and mind, wishing you more courage and endurance as you move through this transition. Take care of yourself. Best thoughts, Margaret Kellner

Margaret Kellner - March 25, 2021 at 09:58 AM

LH

“ *The world lost an extraordinary educator this week. Dr. Spencer was my chemistry professor, mentor and research director at LVC in the late 1970's. Thanks to him, I graduated from LVC with my name as a co-author on two papers published in scientific journals. He made our time in the laboratory interesting, challenging and fun. Like so many of his students, I owe him a great debt of gratitude for helping me succeed in my career as a chemist. My condolences to his wife and family.*

Louise Hackman Hess

Louise Hess - March 24, 2021 at 08:45 PM

MS

“ *Dear Kathy,
I'll always remember Jim as a gentle and caring person. I wasn't aware of the extended interests he pursued.
God bless you for your perseverance and God rest his soul.
Mary Shelly*

Mary Shelly - March 24, 2021 at 03:37 PM

WM

“ Kathleen & family -
I share the loss you are feeling during this time. During my time at Franklin & Marshall College, I got to know Jim by his interest in sports and the great young men and women that played on the F&M teams. He served on the Athletic Committee during some difficult times and was a frequent spectator at F&M home games. Kathy and Jim also provided support for me during a difficult time in my professional life. Jim's friendship and support will be missed by all that knew him.

*Best regards,
Dr. William Marshall*

Willam Marshall - March 24, 2021 at 01:42 PM

BR

“ *I fondly remember sitting next to Jim on a committee at St James . He was also my "man-Friday" working with me on the Ollie's Closet project. A gentle, special person.
Condolences to the Family. Enjoy your memories . Bonita Reed*

Bonita L Reed - March 24, 2021 at 01:26 PM

IP

“ Mrs. Spencer,
I am so sorry to learn of this news. Your husband was such an incredible man, teacher, and mentor. It took my breath away this morning to learn of his passing. I remember his incredible enthusiasm for science and students that was contagious, and I will forever credit him for taking me as a 17 year old college freshman and beginning my life of scientific inquiry. My 4 years working with him in college set a path for me not only as a scientist, but as a mentor to others. I know he did that for so many others. What an incredible life he lived.
Ian Paul

Ian Paul - March 24, 2021 at 12:57 PM

LB

“ Jim was simply awesome in every respect, professional and personal. His interests and abilities were multiform, but he wore his many honors lightly. He was witty and fun to be around. He and his wife Kathy were devoted to each other. His untimely loss to Alzheimer's was an ongoing tragedy.

Louise K Barnett - March 24, 2021 at 09:41 AM