



James Allen Benson

July 13, 1943 - June 27, 2022

James Allen Benson, age 78 of Lewes, DE, passed away on Monday, June 27, 2022, at Beebe Healthcare, in Lewes. He was born on July 13, 1943, in Hutchinson, KS, the youngest of six children of the late Roy and Lenora (Soric) Benson.

James enjoyed telling the story of the toolkit purchased for him by his father one Christmas when he was five or six years old. He said that after two weeks of going to the basement each night, trying to teach James basic skills, his father finally said to him, "James, I think you need to go to college." James worked in universities for the entirety of his career.

James graduated from Hutchinson High School, Class of 1961 and the University of Kansas, majoring in American History and Asian Studies, Class of 1965. He attended graduate school at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, where he earned his M.L.S. in 1966 and his Ph.D. in Library Service in 1977. His dissertation research focused on leadership styles in academic libraries.

James' career at St. John's University spanned 27 years. He began on the faculty in the Division of Library and Information Science. James also served as Director of the Library School, Dean of Libraries, Chief Information Officer, Dean of Information Resources, and Vice Provost of Academic Affairs. He retired as Dean Emeritus and Professor, University Libraries in May 2010.

James will most fondly be remembered by the St. John's faculty for spearheading a two-week summer faculty writing program held on the Rome, Italy campus. Following a week of hard work, family members were invited to join them for the second week and were treated to tours of religious art in Rome and the surrounding countryside. James was toasted often during the two-week program.

James also served on the teaching faculties of the University of Alabama (1977-1983), Rutgers University (1971-1977), and the University of North Carolina. He worked as a

Reference and Government Documents Librarian at Southwest Texas State University, now Texas State University (1967-1968) and Circulation and Reference Librarian at Texas Southern University (1966-1967). He served as a visiting librarian at California State University, Chico, in the 1970s, as well.

James was actively involved professionally in the American Library Association, where his proudest accomplishment was serving on the Committee on Accreditation (COA), the decision-making body for accrediting master's degree programs. He also served on the Board of Directors of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE).

James authored both books and articles during his career. One of his most influential works was "Principals of Searching" with Ruth Kay Murray in RQ. James' most interesting article titles include "The Neurochemical Bases of Library Use...Or Why We Love Harlequins" with Daniel O. O'Connor, in Collection Building, and his guest editorial in *Voya*, "Permission to Read Boring Book Form". Both of these titles were ultimately selected for inclusion in Bill Katz's "Best of Library Lit". He was also known for his work on library technology.

James married the love of his life, Susan J. Beck in July of 1984. Together, they shared many adventures and many a gourmet meal. They complemented each other well and were devoted to each other.

James was known for his wit, knowledge of arcane information, and analytical ability to dissect the news of the day. He loved reading the New York Times each day and had an insatiable sense of curiosity. Many friends and family regretted playing Trivial Pursuit with him.

As a teenager, James read the Encyclopedia Britannica for entertainment in the Hutchinson Public Library. His love of books and information were integral to who he was as a person. James loved reading mysteries and science fiction, and his favorite books included *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Heinlin), *Night of the Hunter* (Grubb), and anything by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammet, or Bill Pronzini.

James loved food, cooking, and eating at interesting restaurants. His specialties in home cooking included a Texas based chili, pot roast, and bread making. He loved meatloaf and his mother's cinnamon rolls and zucchini bread.

James sought out gastronomic pleasures and adventures. His favorite food experience

was a 22-course meal in a restaurant in Orvieto, Italy. He was a member of a Cooking Light Super Club and a Martini Club. The gin martinis actually had a hint of vermouth with preferably French Verte Lucque olives...shaken, not stirred.

James enjoyed traveling, whether camping, cruising, or by train. He especially enjoyed Canadian and European travel. Coastal Maine was one of his favorite places to visit in the U.S. Highlights of James' travels included trips to Cuba, Iceland, Greenland, Northern Africa, Hawaii, cruising through the Panama Canal, Scandinavia, Italy, Ireland, France, and Portugal. He also enjoyed visiting local botanical gardens and was a long-time member of Longwood Gardens.

James has loved and been loved by many feline friends, including Ebony Onyx, Bess, Maggie, John Witherspoon, and Domino. Currently, Zachary, a petite yet ferocious blackish-gray tiger, and Dashiell, a 20-pound, flame point Siamese are already grieving his loss. He also loved his childhood cat, Dick Tracy and his dog, Dusty.

In addition to his parents, James was preceded in death by his brothers: Edward Benson, George Benson, William Benson, Robert Benson, and Walter Benson. He is survived by his beloved wife of 37 years, Susan J. Beck; his sister-in-law, Catherine Marksbury (Robert) of Norwalk, OH; his niece, Cynda Benson (Dudley Stutz) of Savannah, GA; and his nephews: Michael Benson of Hutchinson, KS, Fritz Benson (Becky) of Colwich, KS, Philip Smith (Kate) of Avon Lake, OH, and Adam Smith (Lisa) of Lake Wylie, SC.

James' family encourages you to buy a book (preferably from an independent bookseller, or even a garage sale!) and read it in memory of James. He would love that!

Please sign the virtual guestbook located on the tribute page.

Services are private.

Tribute Wall

PT

“ James Benson was a special person in my life, and I am grateful that I knew him. We began together on the faculty at the Graduate School of Library Service at the University of Alabama in the Fall of 1977. I had been working on my classes for a month prior and was amazed that James already had made his acquaintance of so many people in the library within a few days of arriving. That was his way.

He was very helpful to me as I began my research, serving as a sounding board and providing feedback and, with his encyclopedic knowledge, additional sources.

James had a serious operation while at UA and he stayed with Lis and me afterwards for a week. At the end of that time, he announced that, after observing us, he planned to get married! We are still not sure what we displayed but were delighted when he successfully wooed Susan and began their journey together.

James introduced me to the concept of “Holding Court” at conferences which involved him sitting in the lobby of the conference hotel headquarters and greeting his many friends as they came by. I believe that his spirit is somewhere waiting to greet us

Philip Turner - July 20 at 02:22 PM

BT

“ My condolences come to you, Susan, on the loss of Jim from your life. I know the love you shared sustained the two of you through the rough moments you experienced and caused so much joy in the many happy times you spent together. Jim came into my life as a master's student at Rutgers, when he was in the doctoral program. Rutgers alums remain a close group. Many of us followed Jim's illustrious career and the contributions he made to our profession, especially in his long tenure at St. John's, where he successfully brought his knowledge of the field's needs in service to the people and the university role in education together to assure librarians ready to respond to them. I know that it is difficult now to remember your days together without a tear, but you and I both know, too, that Jim would want you to return to happy smiles as soon as possible when you think of him and your shared gourmet meals, travels, and joy of learning. My thoughts are with you. Betty Turock, Past President, American Library Association; Professor and Associate Dean Emerita, Rutgers, School of Communication, Information, and Library Science.

Betty Turock - July 11 at 11:51 AM

LM

“ Larry MacDonald purchased the Crystal Cross Bouquet for the family of James Allen Benson.



Larry MacDonald - July 08 at 10:09 AM

BR

“ James encouraged me to apply to the DLIS program at St. John's and later hired me as University Archivist and then promoted me to Associate University Librarian for Collections. I am truly grateful for the opportunities that he made possible and will always remember him fondly. I am so sorry to learn of his passing.

*Blythe Roveland-Brenton
Director of Special Collections
Binghamton University*

Blythe Roveland-Brenton - July 07 at 10:33 AM

RL

I am very sorry to hear. He was a very pleasant and erudite man. I will. Surely buy a book and read it remembering him. My condolences to you all.

Richard Lockshin - July 16 at 08:22 PM

DO

“ I worked with James on a number of committees and was always impressed with his friendly demeanor, his sense of humor, and that rare ability to take things in stride. When he left his position as Vice Provost he encouraged me to apply, and gave me some great advice as I entered that role. He had a larger than life presence, and I missed having his counsel after he left the University. He was the person who came up with the idea to hold Writing Across the Curriculum workshops on our Rome campus, and I have very fond memories of our conversations during that time, dining and talking and laughing together. -- Derek Owens

Derek Owens - July 07 at 10:29 AM

HE

“ Jim was a good friend and a wonderful and inspiring colleague. His contributions to the profession will be lasting Thanks, Susan, for sharing this moving tribute.

*Hendrik Edelman
Professor Emeritus
School of Communication and Information
Rutgers University*

Hendrik Edelman - July 06 at 08:06 PM

MC

“ The world lost a good man. Rest in Peace, Doctor Benson.

Marcus Cheung - July 06 at 05:29 PM

RD

“ James was always looking out for what could be rather than what is, thinking more of others than himself. He did not micro manage and this meant everything to me--personally. Ross Dealy

Ross Dealy - July 06 at 05:25 PM

RC

“ Reshma Chan lit a candle in memory of James Allen Benson



Reshma Chan - July 06 at 01:11 PM

LR

“ My deepest condolences, Dr. Benson will always be remembered as a wonderful teacher and friend. We are all lessened without his presence. Back in 2001 he met with IT as CIO.



Luis Ramos - July 06 at 12:56 PM

JK

“ James was a great inspiration to me at St. John's, as a person, scholar, librarian, and tech enthusiast. So helpful to all of us. In the early 1980s, we shared an interest in those new 9"-screen personal-computer-things. Kaypros. He knew how to fix the bugs!

Jeff Kinkley - July 06 at 12:28 PM

JN

Dr. Benson always greeted me on campus, found time to chat, and enthusiastic about the use of technology in the classroom.

Jay Nathan - July 06 at 01:47 PM

JG

“ Dr. Benson was a gentleman, and a kindhearted person! My deepest sympathies to Susan.
Rest In Peace, Dr. Benson!

Jackie Grogan - July 06 at 12:13 PM

RW

“ Glad to have known him. He reached out to my wife during 911 when my status was still unknown. I am grateful to have had him as a colleague at SJU.



Ricky Waller - July 06 at 12:07 PM

DC

Dr. Benson was great, kind and always helpful. Always will be remembered.

Dr. Antoinette Collarini-Schlossberg - July 06 at 12:37 PM

JS

I knew Dr. Benson in many roles at St. John's University. He was a wonderful, caring person, that I will greatly miss.

Jim Swike - July 06 at 02:41 PM

LH

“ *Lucy Heckman lit a candle in memory of James Allen Benson*



Lucy Heckman - July 06 at 09:31 AM

CF

“ *James was a kind and gentle mentor to me. First, as one of his students in the DLIS program at St. John's University, and then later as a trusted and encouraging colleague in the University Libraries. I owe much of my professional success to his guidance and wisdom. He was always generous with his guidance and words of encouragement. I am grateful to have known him.*

Caroline Fuchs - July 06 at 08:56 AM

JM

“ *Jim taught me while getting my MLS at Rutgers both in class and after at get togethers as one of my brother Dennis' closest friends. He had such a gentle patient big hearted presence. I still have the pivoting Scrabble game he gave me when he moved to Alabama. It has always thrilled me to think of him when starting to play a game. Just used it last week when visiting with Natalie, Dennis' beloved wife and Jim's dear friend. May he Rest In Peace, John McGinty*

John McGinty - July 02 at 03:58 PM

SL

“ I had the privilege of working with James for 12 wonderful years at SJU. We frequently carpooled together from New Jersey with Phil Clark. I was the “new kid on the block” and enjoyed listening to and joining in the conversations on a wide range of topics, which often continued into our Wednesday night Chinese take-out meal with Marilyn and Bella, during the free time before our classes began.

I admired James not only for his incredible breadth of knowledge of our field, but for his willingness to support new ideas, which enabled me to develop and teach my first online metadata class in 2001, earlier than most other LIS programs. We were both technology geeks and worked together to develop new methods of using evolving course-ware. For me it was a time of exciting exploration in a rapidly changing library world. I learned so much and grew as a teacher and colleague because of James’s support and encouragement. I also remember some great parties with Susan and James as well! Good times.

I will always be grateful for his mentoring and friendship. RIP James.

Sherry Vellucci Leaver - July 02 at 02:15 PM

AJ

“ I remember meeting James at your wedding. I knew after talking to him briefly that he was a perfect match for you! I don’t think we met again face to face until more than 30+ years later for lunch a few years back. I still had the same impression of the two of you together. Definitely, as they say “soul mates”! Keep all your memories of James, as they must be wonderful! Sending you lots of hugs



Ann Jones - July 02 at 03:35 AM

DO

“ James Benson has had a lasting impact on his colleagues and friends. I remember meeting him for the first time in 1974. Immediately, I knew we would be lifelong friends. We served on the Rutgers faculty together and we kept in regular contact for 48 years.

James was an intellectual at the very best level: he kept informed from traditional as well as weird sources; he sparkled with interesting ideas that few others could have imagined; and, he had a sense of humor which was unique and hilarious. He was both the jackpot colleague and the loyal friend. He was “the Guy” folks would seek out to discuss ideas to garner new insights and new sources.

Importantly, James made significant contributions to our ever-evolving library profession. James had a major impact on our graduate students at the universities where he taught and among our colleagues at ALA and ALISE. He understood what constituted scholarship across diverse disciplines and he taught future librarians and colleagues how to search and evaluate scholarly information to build bridges linking different and often isolated areas of knowledge.

I also remember how excited James was to meet and marry Susan. They truly complemented each other and worked together with their ideas and their contributions to make our library profession better as it coped with significant dynamic changes in technology and information management.

James was a giant of a guy who touched the lives of those around him. He had a significant impact on making our libraries better. I will always treasure the never-ending font of substantive ideas which emerged from him in effortless ways. James will be missed and his contributions will live on through his students and his colleagues.

Dan O'Connor - July 01 at 08:28 PM

HB

“ Herb and I will always remember our Lewes neighbor, James. He was a kind man who knew answers to lots of questions. We will miss him.

Herb and Joanne Brentari - July 01 at 06:18 PM

“ Although we did not have the pleasure of knowing James very long, we were privileged to have him as a Florida neighbor during season. James was a pleasant fellow, and very accomplished personally and professionally. I will always remember how Susan, the love of his life, adored him. I wish we had the opportunity to know him more intimately. His obituary is truly amazing. The next book we purchase will be dedicated to his memory.

Claire and Harold Chesnoff

Claire and Harold Chesnoff - July 01 at 02:33 PM