

Gone Fishing

JAMES ALBERT
MARION,
1942–2003

BY JACK MURRAY



Getting to know Jim Marion was as easy as falling off your new two-wheeled bike for the first time, without the pain and embarrassment.

Jim was soft spoken with an inner calm that revealed his deep faith in people. His smile was infectious; his eyes were clear signs of confidence. I knew that when he walked into a room, someone was going to have a good laugh, because laughter was his constant companion.

Maybe it was his southern heritage and his parents' caring that shaped his easy ways, but whatever it was, it worked in perfect harmony with others.

Jim was born in Abbeville, South Carolina. He was a long-time resident of Philadelphia; after serving in the U.S. Army from 1963-65, he came to work at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, where he remained for the next thirty-eight years to the enrichment and benefit of all who came into contact with him and the Museum.

Jim was one of the first to extend his hand to me when I first came to UPM in early June 1975. I could tell by his firm but gentle grip, and those bright eyes, that Jim was the man to know. He could take you to the bowels of the museum and explain the

workings of strange, and very often, antique-looking equipment. That mass of piping in B-163 surely had a purpose and Jim understood that purpose. He would explain to me how integral to the Museum's infrastructure and performance those pipes were. His desire to understand gave him purpose and challenge. Electrical systems didn't slow him down; he could change a broken circuit breaker as easily as I would change my socks.

In addition to kindness and laughter, Jim possessed many other wonderful qualities. Never did I hear Jim pass along unkind remarks about others. And Jim's desire to help others always prevailed. These might have been rare human traits in others, but not to him.

Later, in our many years of work together, we spoke of retirement, of how Jim wished to return to South Carolina, to family and dear friends. Those family gatherings he told me about seemed to tug at his heart and provide him with solace. "I want to go fishing," he told me, "find that special fishing hole, drop my line in the water, lie down and wait for the big ones to bite."

Well, I think he has found that special place, where he has dropped his line in and is lying back on the green grass, eyes a little closed against the sunlight. May that filtering light through the leaves warm and caress his smiling face, while the cool breezes rise from the lake to comfort him.

Happy fishing, my friend. Leave a few for me. Happy fishing.

Jack Murray is the University of Pennsylvania Museum's exhibits designer.