

Thirteen years ago, almost to the day, we held a retirement function for Larry Jahn, ^{Washington DC.} On that occasion, it was my honor to publicly announce that it also was a special occasion for one of his granddaughters. I am again so honored. Happy birthday, Elizabeth, a few days early.

LAURENCE R. JAHN

INDUCTION INTO THE WISCONSIN CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME

Remarks by Richard E. McCabe

April 24, 2004

Stevens Point, Wisconsin

This is my second opportunity to provide remarks for an inductee into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame. As a Wisconsin expatriate and still an Iowa County landowner, I am grateful for any chance to visit my home state. But it is a particular pleasure to be here today to commemorate the career of Laurence R. Jahn, to celebrate his life and to honor a man who was my boss, mentor, colleague and friend.

Let me start the perspective by acquainting you with a memorable quote from Larry. In 1991, in an exchange with his recent successor as president of the Wildlife Management Institute, Larry said—*quote* “Do not let McCabe talk to our Board of Directors”—*end quote*.

More Hemingwayesque than Shakespearian in its eloquence, the statement was his characteristically straightforward way of expressing concern about what I might ^{bluntly} say to the WMI Board regarding just about anything. Larry himself was strictly a give-them-only-as-much-as-they-need type of communicator on matters of business and finance.

Larry hired me in April 1977. By June 1977, he realized that I was considerably more forthcoming in my communications than he was in his, and he was never entirely certain just what it was I might come forth with. He learned firsthand the fabled maxim: If you hire Irish, you get Irish.

When told of this quote a number of years ago, I took no umbrage. Larry and I operated and communicated differently. That was one of the few things I understood better than he did. For all of our differences in style, temperament and intelligence, I think we worked pretty well together. For my part, I got to witness a man who earned a place in Wisconsin's august Conservation Hall of Fame.

I trust that all of you recognize the irony of my ^{providing} remarks about Larry, in that the one person he probably would have preferred "not talk to the Board," so to speak, now has the microphone.

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Somewhere in a wilderness portion of the heavens, right now, Larry is looking down, his arms across his chest, and one hand cradling his chin, with a finger nervously tapping his cheek, because he still isn't certain what's coming next.

For the 15 years that I worked with him as closely as anyone did during the late 1970s and '80s, I apparently kept him on tenterhooks. I won't do that now.

In my experience and opinion, Laurence Roy Jahn, originally of Jefferson County, Wisconsin, who died at age 74, on August 15, 2000, can be ranked among history's 10 most influential wildlife conservationists. Likewise, as ~~his colleague and~~ a student of ^{reasonably objective} conservation history, I consider Larry's professional legacy in a league with the those the likes of Ira Gabrielson, Hoyes Lloyd, Carl Shoemaker, George Bird Grinnell, William Hornaday and a very few others. I place that legacy only a notch or two below those of the venerable Aldo Leopold and Theodore Roosevelt. For fully a third of the lifetime of professional wildlife science, Larry Jahn helped to frame and guide its agenda. By force of conviction, energy and intellect, and mainly by tacit acclimation, he became one of the natural resource conservation profession's foremost spokesmen.

Greatness and leadership in conservation have rarely been synonymous. I offer the forementioned pantheon with no apologies, but certainly with acknowledgment that dozens of others, past and present, contributed/have contributed enormously to the scope and momentum of conservation in Wisconsin, nationally and globally. In fact, conservation has many great people--altruists of extraordinary acumen, talent and dedication. We also have no shortage of leaders, including plenty of very good ones. But, truly *great* leaders in conservation always have been in short supply. The Peter Principle gets its most vigorous exercise in this discipline.

In any case, the forementioned few were the ones--in my view-- who, in ways heroic and/or machevellian, set the national and international foundations--philosophically, pragmatically and politically--for conservation advances. Excepting Leopold, Roosevelt and maybe Grinnell and Hornaday, too little is known of these prime movers.

Larry Jahn's induction into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame is a right thing. It is a tribute to greatness and, in a way, it validates that Larry's contributions to science and conservation do not become--like those of Gabrielson, Lloyd and Shoemaker --too little known.

Although I have spoken about him on a few other formal occasions since his passing, it was neither my intention nor desire to become Larry Jahn's Boswell. I don't have the patience or ~~objectivity~~ *emotional distance*. And there looms the considerable risk of disappointment attendant to trying to encapsulate this versatile and prolific man's career in mere words and sentences however many. But because Larry Jahn was a conservation great, because he was my boss, mentor, colleague and friend, I appreciate this opportunity to share some candid, Plutarchian snapshots of my time with Larry, so that he might be a little better known to you.

I have a Wildlife Management Institute business card. Under my name are the words "Vice President." I don't hand out many, because I feel that they are somewhat fraudulent. As far as I am concerned, there was only one WMI vice president ... and that was Larry Jahn. That was the title on his business cards from 1971 to '87. Those were his halcyon days, his golden era, his wonderbread years on the national and international stages. I am aware of no North American conservation issue or national legislation or program of consequence in which Larry was not involved.

Virtually everyone active in the conservation arena during the 1971 to 1987 period surely can attest to Larry's seeming omnipresence. They can tell you who was the NGO champion of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program, of watershed management, of state and provincial wildlife agency organization and authorities, of Sikes Act advances, of ~~the National Waterfowl Management Plan,~~ waterfowl production areas for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, of the Soil Bank program and subsequent CRP, and the Wetland Reserve Program. And much more.

During that time, the mantra of naysayers and other bad guys-- the antimanagement, antihunting, antidiversity contingents-- parroted Butch Cassidy's cinematic conundrum: "Who are those guys?" Those guys, more often than not, were the ubiquitous WMI Vice President Larry Jahn. I can't begin to tell you many times people asked how one person could have the time, energy, skill and license to do all that was on his resume. Let me assure you that the resume was not padded in the least, and that I and others at WMI often asked ourselves the same thing. We lived and worked in his slipstream.

Snapshot 1. Larry was a certifiable workaholic. Not only was he consumed by his multiple roles, duties and responsibilities, but he was one of those rare persons who can operate nearly always at peak energy, but requires only a few hours of sleep daily.

When we traveled together on business, Larry and I frequently shared a room, because WMI was, and remains, shall we say, thrifty. Wherever we went, Larry had an office, more or less. So as not to disturb me during the night, he set himself up to work in the bathroom. It was a bit like rooming with a bat. I honestly do not recall ever awakening at night during those times of shared accommodation when he wasn't quietly at work in his so-called office.

Snapshot 2. Larry was extremely well read--a voracious reader, including ^{of} some of the most banal, nosebleed boring stuff in all of literature. He virtually combed environmental impact statements and esoteric reports on everything from ~~Precambrian~~ ^{intestinal parasites} ~~geology~~ ^{in warblers} to theories of limnology to treatises on profitable beekeeping. And he didn't forget much of what read.

Snapshot 3. Larry Jahn was a listener. He listened and absorbed. Except when in conversation, his listening invariably was accompanied by taking notes--copious notes--damnable copious notes. Before the era of email, we at the Institute had "LRJ mail," which amounted to 3- by 4-inch notes from Larry outlining plans, schedules, marching orders and other antagonisms. Larry wrote in a very small, obtuse, cursive style, reminiscent of some wormwood cipher. He could have written the equivalent of the original Articles of Confederation on a single note. No one who associated with Larry was immune from those annoying missives. I believe that I held the record at WMI by having 16 notes on my desk one morning.

More to the point is that, in his nocturnal work habits, his attention to others' thoughts and data, and through his note-taking and note-writing, Larry's vocation, avocation and preoccupation were the perpetual processing of information. He had an enormous and dynamic intellectual capacity.

Snapshot 4. In 1983, Larry, three colleagues in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I went on a guided eight-day elk hunt in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. We staged outside of Choteau, Montana, and went in by horseback--about 18 miles of unnervingly steep, slippery, snow-covered mountain trails.

Larry was not a novice rider, but he wasn't Tom Mix either. Somehow, he was assigned a very large, grey mount, on which he looked ridiculous because his short legs sort of splayed out from the big animal's sides. Several of us offered to switch, but he liked the horse, because it plodded and didn't show a propensity to vault streams and rills. So plodding and methodical was this big gray that we quickly renamed it Old Qualuud.

After six or seven hours of riding, on terrifyingly narrow and slick trails, we finally reached the valley where the camp was located. It was a relief at long last to be riding level for a change, without the ground dropping off into forever on one side or the other. Besides chafed thighs and compacted vertebrae, the tenderfeet among us were mighty grateful to be only a mile or two from camp.

The little mare I rode at the rear of the conga line procession had the habit of dawdling or fussing in one location, then bolting back in line. She and I had just raced and skidded back up to the group when, right ahead, Old Qualuud, with Larry aboard, plodded between two large trees. After ~~all the other~~ ^{the} mules ^{and} horses and their riders had passed, a pine squirrel on one of the trees chose that moment to scream at us interlopers.

The shrill, sudden chattering startled Old Qualuud out of his sleepwalking, and he instantly sucked in air and crowhopped. Larry never had a chance. With a death grip on the saddle horn and his boots firmly in the stirrups, he was spun violently underneath his mount. He was body-slammed to the ground and knocked unconscious, but remained suspended in the saddle upside down under Old Qualuud, who ceased jumping, but stomped Larry once and seemed anxious to head back toward Choteau. Very luckily, the one experienced horseman among us hunters was close at hand and we managed to grab the horse, keep it steady and prevent further harm to its inverted, senseless rider.

Larry revived somewhat after 10 or 15 minutes and I helped him limp the rest of the way to camp. He conversed with me during that trek but clearly had no clue what planet he was on.

It seemed certain he had at least a concussion and internal injuries. So, we hunters and the guides powwowed and decided that someone would have to ride out, even though it was late afternoon, and get help--which meant a night-time helicopter rescue. We informed Larry of our decision, and even in his banged up state and clearly goofy, he was blisteringly adamant that he wasn't leaving. Neither individually nor collectively were we able to bargain, badger or bully him into agreeing to go out. So, we took turns for the next day, trying to keep him awake and to make sure there weren't signs that his condition was deteriorating.

Larry regained his senses and equilibrium after about three days, but was mighty uncomfortable. With help, he even hunted one day. It turned out that he had a severe concussion and a variety of other significant traumas. He suffered plenty on that adventure; he suffered silently and he refused to quit. Those, too, were characteristic. He was tenacious and dogged, and he could be bullheaded. There never was any quit in Larry Jahn, and he nearly always got his way.

Another aspect of the Jahn mystique--**snapshot 5**--was his surreal sense of organization, both mentally and materially. At his home in Vienna, Virginia, during his WMI vice presidency, his office there was a candidate for the eighth wonder of the world. He put reports, legal pads, notes, testimony, books--everything literature--in stacked piles on the floor. At times, there were nearly a dozen of these columns, as I recall, some chest high. It was a scary place, and looked like some sort of pulp stalagmite horror. Children were not allowed in the office; adults feared to enter. Larry moved about the maze like a waterbug, adding to a tippy stack or extracting from another. He knew where everything was and was able to retrieve what he needed without instigating a domino reaction that might have caused paper cuts as far away as Richmond.

That is an exaggeration, of course, but it is not exaggeration that Larry had a similar cognitive retrieval system. He had an extraordinary ability to access and cross reference facts and figures when conversing, lecturing or testifying before Congress, as he did dozens of times.

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Snapshot 6. Because he was at the forefront or in the vortex of so many different issues at any one time, Larry was in great demand as a public speaker and he rarely turned down invitations "to spread the good word," as he called it. When I started with WMI, Larry asked me to draft talks for him. He would absolutely butcher my copy and send me back at least several times for rewrites. We would argue about terms, tempo, transitions, grammar, diction--almost everything. This went on for more than a year, until I finally heard him present one of the talks I had gone through the blood-letting process to complete. Not only did he not use any of it, but he didn't even speak to the same topic.

I then learned that he almost never spoke to a prepared text. He then learned that my ghostwriting days were over. Neither was a big deal because, thereafter, he seldom drafted a speech until weeks after it was delivered. In lieu of script, he almost always had a sheaf of papers or legal pad on which there were those longhand, wormwood hieroglyphics, but I don't recall that he ever referred much to them either. Larry was a very effective and convincing speaker. Through his words, as through his actions and attitude, he inspired a great number of young professionals and veteran conservationists alike.

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Snapshot 7. Larry had a passion for "reading the landscape"--a phrase borrowed, I believe, from Leopold, whose Game Management course Larry took. However, during my years with Larry, he seldom had or took much time to indulge that passion. He worked. Even when we traveled, hunted or camped together, he rarely relaxed his business persona, mindset or regimen. Regardless of our venue--no matter how remote or rugged--he always carried a full briefcase.

Larry was an enthusiastic hunter, but his self-set schedule did not allow him to go afield very often. He especially relished times with old friends at deer camp in northern Wisconsin, but his unwillingness to extricate himself from the job during late November caused him to forego too many of those times.

Over the years, Larry and I hunted together for elk, deer, waterfowl, pronghorn and pheasants, but those sojourns were few and far between. I suppose it was mainly on hunts that he "read the landscape," because he hunted--for want of a better term--distractedly. He was sort of a blaze-orange Ferdinand, who roamed rather than stalked, and who looked for songbirds, leaves, wild flowers, rock formations or rainbows for all I could tell. He never seemed very attentive to our quarry, so didn't bag much. But he truly loved being in the outdoors and the camaraderie of the campfire, at least once he was gone long enough from the job or far enough from what I assumed was a warehouse full of 3- by 4-inch note papers.

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Snapshot 7. In some part, the reason that Larry was able to achieve greatness during his WMI vice presidential heyday was the fortuity of association with his boss, Dan Poole, another great conservationist. Dan gave Larry a great deal of license to get things accomplished, but Dan was in charge. He was the literal and figurative governor for Larry, whose drive and acumen tended to cause him to outpace his support staff. Dan made sure that WMI stayed within parameters set by him, not by Larry's unusual if not superhuman constitution. With that respectful constraint, but almost total programmatic license, Larry's star shone very brightly. Wildlife science and conservation were the major beneficiaries.

Larry became president of WMI when Dan Poole retired in 1986. He inherited a staff that had been reduced substantially because of severe economic difficulties over which WMI had no control--a diminished staff that had been asked to increase its workload significantly and at less compensation, but worst of all, get into areas about which we had little expertise.

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Snapshot 8. Larry Jahn--one of the best biologists, soldiers and point men North American conservation has ever had--was not a great administrator. His skill, his greatness, was enabling conservation of natural resources and, in this, he was a leader. But Larry was only a fair administrator. He seemed unable to say no to outside requests for time, information, service and advice, even when we were overwhelmed. He also was unwilling to delegate much authority, and he managed the business of the organization in great secrecy. For these reasons, and without a governor, he tended to exasperate his staff.

The vast majority of people who associated with Larry saw him as a charming, fairly quiet, studious and intense gentleman. So he was, nearly all of the time. However, the weight of organizational administration, his professional agenda, a travel schedule that rivaled Henry Kissinger's and the vagaries of dealing with an impatient Board of Directors, a beleaguered staff and a demanding public, sometimes tested Larry's good nature. He could be very direct, forceful and, on occasion, loud.

Even in the best of times, Larry was not particularly easy to work with or for. His energy, tenacity and focus often frustrated those of us around him. His relentlessness made him a high-maintenance boss, and finding rhythm or purchase in his slipstream could be taxing indeed.

Although WMI struggled somewhat in the late 1980s, despite Larry's political savvy, ecological brilliance and community influence, his personal profile and prestige blossomed. And legitimately so. To his great credit, when he neared the age of mandatory retirement in 1991, Larry didn't seek and endorse as his replacement someone who might have been considered a clone. He encouraged instead the hire of someone with strong administrative capability as well as being a solid scientist. In the fulfillment of that encouragement, WMI's slippery slope leveled.

Snapshot 9¹⁰. If there is an adage about old wildlifers fading away, it didn't apply to Larry Jahn. He remained very active as an advisor to a number of conservation organizations, including WMI, and to individuals in the profession who had long relied on his wisdom and counsel, including me. He served with distinction on the Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries Commission, including as its chairman in 1993 and 1994. And until cancer struck cruelly a few months before his death, Larry was all but besieged with requests to speak to audiences throughout the country on the history and future of wildlife conservation.

Snapshot 10. Larry and I were both former Badgers. We both attended graduate school at the U.W.-Madison. We later shared office space, hotel rooms, bathroom offices, tents, duck blinds, cross-country car trips, rides in scary little planes and jumbo jets. I remain grateful for all of that and more. I was privileged to have the unique opportunity to share time with someone whose genius will be clearly recognized someday in the measure of wild things and wild places.

Again, I am grateful for this opportunity to have provided you with some reflections of a boss, mentor, colleague and friend. I hope that, because of these snapshots, you know a little more about a prime mover, leader and icon in the wildlife profession-- someone who, in final assessment, was a great person.

If anyone ever asks you who Laurence R. Jahn was, please inform him or her that Larry was a son of Wisconsin by birth and by choice, one of ^{North Americas} conservation's [^]immortals and he was *the* vice president of the Wildlife Management Institute. Thank you.