



## James F. Ruff

August 31, 2024

Fort Collins native Jim Ruff was born to German-Russian immigrant parents in their Smith Street home on November 17, 1937, attended by a midwife. His mother, Mollie, was a cook, his father, Fred, a carpenter. Jim died in his Mountain Avenue home on August 31, 2024. He attended Laurel Elementary, Lincoln Junior High, and FCHS, where, as a student athlete, he was an All-Conference football halfback. Jim graduated from Colorado State University in 1959 with his first engineering degree, subsequently earning two more engineering degrees from CSU, and culminating his education with a Ph.D. from MIT in 1970. Jim met Walta Speece on a blind date, and they married in 1958 while CSU undergraduates. Their son, Michael James, was born in Fort Collins in 1965. Jim served in the U.S. Army (1960-63), receiving Soldier of the Month awards at both Ft. Ord and Ft. Huachuca.

As a graduate student, Jim worked parttime at CSU's Hydraulics Laboratory on the Foothills Campus. His memory of those days was that he shoveled lots of sand. Then, years and graduate degrees later, as a CSU professor, he became Director of that Hydraulics Laboratory. His expertise in water hydraulics took him to projects around the world: irrigation usage in the Nile Valley, sewers in Barcelona, erosion control in Peru and Taiwan. During a three-year leave from CSU, Jim commuted daily to Laramie to design and to supervise construction of dams for Banner Consulting Engineers. Jim retired from CSU in 2006, and immediately began traveling the U.S. to teach National

Highway Institute short courses for state Departments of Transportation.

Every year in Jim's childhood, his dad and big brother took little Jim up the Poudre for the first day of fishing season. Always freezing cold wind and icy water, but the excitement of fishing trips stayed with Jim for a lifetime.

Yellowstone Park camping trips every other year to fish, bush plane flights into back country Alaska to fish, or an afternoon up the Big Thompson to fish, satisfaction was all the same. For years Jim carried his aluminum boat on top of his pickup, having it handy just in case he could find an hour to see how the fish were biting at Horsetooth. Bird hunting, big game hunting, Jim often had successful hunts, but just as often a successful hunt wasn't measured in game taken, but rather in the amount of time spent in the company of best friends.

In 2012 Jim began experiencing confusion and memory loss, and by 2014 he received a diagnosis of dementia, probable Alzheimer's. His life to that point, though, had been to identify and to accept big challenges; here was one more, and it was time to get on with it. As his son said, "Dad always had the ability to be amazed and find wonder in everything he saw and did. Dementia opened the door for him to be the little boy who found wonder in the green of the fields and the blue of the sky where others might not even notice." His last years were supported by family, friends, Dementia Together, VOA's Caring Companions, Right at Home, and Elderhaus. His last months were supported by care from grandson Nick. They walked downtown for coffee, played cribbage, tended a garden, sat on the porch to watch the world go by. Jim's last fishing trip was two weeks before he died, and he watched the Tour de Fat from his front porch the Saturday before, greeting neighbors as they passed.

Jim is survived by his wife, Walta; his son, Michael; his grandson, Nicholas Bakken; his granddaughter, Madison Ruff; his sister-in-law, Marji Nash (Doug);

his niece, Cheryl Brunswig; his nephews, Dave Ruff, Greg Ruff, and Kirk McGregor. He was predeceased by siblings Miriam Hulbert, Wilma Thomas, Edward Ruff, and Doris McGregor.

The family would be gratified if memorials were made to Dementia Together, [dementiatogether.org](http://dementiatogether.org). A celebration of Jim's life will be held later.

# Tribute Wall

DS

“ I knew and worked with Jim over many years in the CSU College of Engineering and always enjoyed and appreciated my interactions with him. We shared time at the Engineering Research Center while he was in charge of the Hydraulics program. However, work was not our only connection. You probably know that Jim was an avid outdoorsman who engaged in fishing and hunting and in that arena he and I had common interests as well. Some of my most fun memories of interaction with Jim came from the times we were doing outdoor events.

*I remember the time: Several profs would go to North Park for evening fishing. A car full of us would leave Fort Collins at about 4pm and drive to the Big Creek Lakes area for evening fishing and get home very late that evening. We all had classes to teach the next morning.*

*Then there was the time one summer weekend when several of us went to the Rawah Wilderness for a hike, for fishing and an overnight campout. For evening mealtime, Jim brought several plastic bags of powder with contents including oatmeal, etc. and the plan was to make pudding for dessert. So with the fire burning merrily we had five or so PhD profs standing around the fire keeping warm and watching the pudding pot boil. Well--it was not thickening up very quickly, so we kept stirring it and saying something like – “I think it is thickening” but it never did. It turns out that Jim had also brought corn meal for frying trout, and we were trying to make pudding with it. So much for our collective PhD educations.*

*Another fond memory involved Walta. My wife and I were at Yellowstone for a fishing and sightseeing trip. We had our boat which we used for fishing and sightseeing on Yellowstone Lake. In the restaurant one evening who should walk by our table but Jim and Walta. Since we had our boat there and planned to go fishing on the lake the next morning we invited them to join us. So, guess what, we all went fishing the next day and the day after. A great memory of good fellowship, good fishing and a good time.*

*To Walta and family, our sincere condolences at the loss of Jim and know that our prayers are with you.*

*Fred W Smith  
Emeritus Prof Mechanical Engineering  
CSU*

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**Dr. Frederick W Smith** - November 09, 2024 at 02:22 PM

SM

“*Jim Ruff (My Dear Dr. Ruff) has been the most important person in our (Wife and I) lives. Period. What he has done for us is unparalleled and exemplary. His passing is one of the hardest things that Yoshiko and I have to go through. The sheer joy of spending time with Jim and Walta will be in our memories for ever. We are not who we are if it is not for Jim and Walta. I was very fortunate to have an opportunity to work as a co-instructor with Jim for the FHWA short courses and we had a lot of fun filled memories. Rest in peace my dear professor and mentor.*

*Su Mishra  
Jim's PhD Student at CSU*

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**Su Mishra** - October 08, 2024 at 09:54 PM

RG

“ Jim was a truly wonderful person and colleague at Colorado State University. Whether just chatting in the hallways or engaging at meeting and various events with Jim, it was always warm and engaging few minutes. I was the Director of the Structural Engineering Laboratory at the Engineering Research Center. We often conversed of many of the challenges of keeping physical facilities maintained and dealing with problems that arose now and then. While in different disciplines of civil engineering we respected one another and our management of ongoing research. I will miss his very friendly and engaging voice and persona! Rest in peace!  
Professor Richard Gutkowski.

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**Richard Gutkowski** - September 16, 2024 at 06:24 PM

HW

“ Jim Ruff, Jerry Bay, and my brother Marvin Wagner were close friends from Lincoln Jr through FCHS and beyond. They were classmates from the 1955 FCHS graduating class. Jim, Jerry, and Marvin seemed to go everywhere together. There were times when Marvin was required to watch over me and when he, Jim and Jerry would go out Marvin would put me on the handlebars of his bicycle and take me along. When Jim was playing on the FCHS basketball team, Marvin would bring me along to watch the home games. I have many wonderful memories of those times. Jim's mom worked at FCHS as a cook and was still there doing the same thing when I graduated from FCHS in 1961. Sadly, Jerry Bay passed away at the age of 42 and my brother Marvin passed away at the age of 62. They can now resume their biking trips.  
Harold Wagner  
La Mirada, CA

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**Harold Wagner** - September 10, 2024 at 03:16 PM

JW

“ Dear Walta,  
I'm very saddened to hear about the passing of your wonderful husband, Jim. Although I do not perhaps consider myself an “inner circle” friend of his, but rather a professional acquaintance, I will always be deeply appreciative of the guidance and professional help he gave me in my own career development. He was kind of a mentor for me, and I always found him to be the kindest and most supportive person for anyone, student or professional, who shared interest in Jim's own professional expertise.

Sincerely,

John Wilkins-Wells

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John Wilkins - September 08, 2024 at 12:26 PM

NG

“ What an inspirational obituary about Jim's life! I had forgotten about the aluminum boat on his truck, and I recall many times he and friends would talk about fishing so you could see how close to his heart that was. Jim was a quintessential engineer, smart enough to handle the heavy lifting and practical enough to make great contributions in the real world. In my mind, Jim ranks in the pantheon of the folks who made CSU civil engineering great. My best wishes to the family. Neil Grigg

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Neil Grigg - September 07, 2024 at 08:32 AM

AB

“ Anita Blair lit a candle in memory of James Ruff



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Anita Blair - September 06, 2024 at 03:19 PM