



GARY M. LOVETT

July 6, 1953 – December 17, 2022



GARY M. LOVETT

Gary M. Lovett, 69, of Stanford, NY, died unexpectedly on December 17 while cross-country skiing in the Catskills with friends. The cause of death is unknown.

Gary was a forest ecologist and Senior Scientist Emeritus at Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, NY, where he worked full-time for 35 years. Throughout his career, Gary stretched the boundaries of ecosystem science, advancing understanding of how forests process pollution, cycle nutrients, and respond to pests and pathogens. His research achievements were matched with a passion for bringing science to bear on policy and practice that led him to forge collaborations with nonprofits, government, and industry, chief among them his Tree-SMART Trade campaign.

A deeply valued member of the Cary community, Gary was a leader and collaborator in so many other communities, among them the Hubbard Brook Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) community, the Catskill Environmental Research and Monitoring (CERM) conference, and the Northeastern Ecosystem Research Cooperative.

Colleague Peter Groffman, who succeeded Gary as the lead investigator on the Hubbard Brook LTER Program, notes, “Gary was an internationally recognized forest ecologist who made fundamental contributions to the field, and aggressively worked the interface between science and society. The strength of his contributions to both the content and culture of science was deep and will be missed by many.”

Raised in New York’s Capital Region, Lovett was shaped by summers at Helderberg Lake in a cabin his parents built by hand. He received a BS in Biology from Union College (1975) and a PhD from Dartmouth College in Biology and Plant Ecology (1981). Before being hired at Cary Institute, he was a postgraduate fellow at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (1981-83) and a research associate at the University of Tennessee (1983-85).



Gene E. Likens, founding President of Cary Institute, hired Gary on staff in 1985. He recalls, “Gary was incredibly bright and an early adapter of using computer models to understand ecosystem processes. He also turned out to have a gift for bringing people together to tackle complex ecological issues in a way that maximized the usefulness of outcomes for everyone. He was an exemplary team player. His scientific contributions have been diverse and have had a very high impact.”

His early research transformed how scientists calculate the nitrogen budgets of forests. He was among the first to document that dry atmospheric deposition — from particles in the air — delivered as much or more nitrogen to forests than rainfall. Gary also advanced scientific understanding of nutrient cycling in forests, in particular how trees, soils, and microbes interact to control nitrogen, and how this regulates forest growth, carbon sequestration, and nitrogen pollution to streams.

One of his first efforts translating science into action drew on his expertise on the interplay between ecosystems and the atmospheric deposition of pollutants. Gary was an author or co-author on many of the most important papers in this area. He worked with The Nature Conservancy on *Threats from Above*, a report highlighting the need for ecologically-relevant air pollution limits and more comprehensive air pollution monitoring, to prevent damage to our nation’s natural resources.

Cary Senior Scientist Emeritus Charlie Canham noted that “Gary was among the first to highlight that while the *Clean Air Act* was effective at reducing the quantity of pollutants that went into the atmosphere, it failed to take into account the different sensitivities of ecosystems and biodiversity that received this pollution when it fell back to Earth.”

While undertaking long-term studies on nutrient cycling in Catskill Mountain forests, Gary was faced with a harsh reality — trees on his study plots were dying off due to pests like Beech Bark Disease,

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, and spongy moths. This spurred him to shift his research and policy focus, and he became a critical ‘voice for the forests’, assembling interdisciplinary experts and advancing science-based solutions to prevent the accidental importation of new forest pests, which he came to see as the most severe threat to forest health throughout the eastern US.

Dr. Canham notes, “The thing that I consider so absolutely remarkable about Gary’s science career was his transition out of the confines of academia to take on the threat of forest pests and pathogens. Tree-SMART Trade is an extraordinary legacy. Anyone who cares about forests needs to do anything they can to ensure that effort lives on.”

His sudden death is a tremendous loss to the field, and all who knew his probing mind, kind nature, and commitment to protecting the natural world, in particular forests. “Gary had a gracious approach to science and professional interactions—no ego involved. He wanted to see the best work done by groups that could tackle thorny issues, and he always managed to have fun in the process. Better colleagues are hard to find,” comments Cary President Emeritus William Schlesinger.

A long-time resident of Stanford, NY, Gary was on the Town of Stanford’s Conservation Advisory Committee, led the effort to develop a new comprehensive plan for the town, and was in the process of leading a Natural Resource Inventory at the time of his death.

At the family’s request, memorial gifts should be made to the Tree-SMART Trade project via Cary Institute.

For more information, see www.caryinstitute.org/science/tree-smart-trade.

FROM EM LOVETT

With the passing of my father, I lost such an important piece of me. My dad was the kindest man I've known, always leading with empathy and genuine concern for others' well-being. I got so much of that from him, feeling so much for others and the world around us and not understanding why others don't care at the same level.

Proud doesn't fully encapsulate how I feel towards my father and his extremely accomplished career as an Environmental Scientist. He worked tirelessly and with so much passion to make this world a better place for all. With all these accomplishments, he was so humble. All of his professional accolades, you would never know unless you pried it out of him as he didn't like talking about himself, he'd rather lend an ear to those he loved.

I will miss you endlessly, dad. There's no reality that makes sense where you're not in it. Your body is gone but your energy and spirit of life is everywhere I look.



FROM JANET

I met Gary accidentally on a warm late September day on top of Slide Mountain, the highest in the Catskills. I still remember his warm, open face. So random a meeting, a small miracle. It was so easy, then a life built together. I love my husband because:

He put cameras in my bluebird boxes so I could watch the chicks grow.

He was willing to mow the lawn in patches so that we would always have flowers for pollinators.

He was my IT guy, helping me deal with Windows.

He figured out that music would make Em stop crying when she was little.

He loved to solve technical problems, like keeping squirrels off the feeders, and never gave up until he did.

He needed my help to pick out his shirts and ties.

He started a fire whenever I wanted one.

And many more reasons. Love you 'smores, Gary.

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF GARY M. LOVETT

Welcome: Dr. Joshua R. Ginsberg, President

Remembrances:

Dr. Richard Ostfeld

Dr. Emma Rosi

Dr. Peter Groffman

Dr. Lynn Christenson, Vassar College

Margaret Fallon, Stanford Town Board

Em Lovett

Open remembrance sharing (microphone will be passed)

Reading: *You Want a Physicist to Speak at Your Funeral*

Dr. Shannon LaDeau and Dr. Christopher Solomon

Candle Lighting Ceremony

Bruce Lovett and Joan Hunter

Song: *The Bristlecone Pine*

Reading: *The Ninth Elegy*

Joan Giurdanella

Closing: Remembrance by William A. Reiners
(read by Dr. Joshua R. Ginsberg)

YOU WANT A PHYSICIST TO SPEAK AT YOUR FUNERAL

You want the physicist to talk to your grieving family about the conservation of energy, so they will understand that your energy has not died.

You want the physicist to remind your sobbing mother about the first law of thermodynamics; that no energy gets created in the universe, and none is destroyed.

You want your mother to know that all your energy, every vibration, every Btu of heat, every wave of every particle that was her beloved child remains with her in this world. You want the physicist to tell your weeping father that amid energies of the cosmos, you gave as good as you got.

And at one point you'd hope that the physicist would step down from the pulpit and walk to your brokenhearted spouse there in the pew and tell him that all the photons that ever bounced off your face, all the particles whose paths were interrupted by your smile, by the touch of your hair, hundreds of trillions of particles, have raced off like children, their ways forever changed by you.

And as your widow rocks in the arms of a loving family, may the physicist let her know that all the photons that bounced from you were gathered in the particle detectors that are her eyes, that those photons created within her constellations of electromagnetically charged neurons whose energy will go on forever.

And the physicist will remind the congregation of how much of all your energy is given off as heat. There may be a few fanning themselves with their programs as he says it. And he will tell him that the warmth that flowed through you in life is still here, still part of all that we are, even as we who mourn continue the heat of our own lives.

And you'll want the physicist to explain to those who loved you that they need not have faith; indeed, they should not have faith. Let them know they can measure, that scientists have measured precisely the conservation of energy and found it accurate, verifiable and consistent across space and time.

You can hope your family will examine the evidence and satisfy themselves that the science is sound and that they'll be comforted to know your energy's still around. According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly.

Amen.

Aaron Freeman, NPR Commentator

FIVE CANDLES

Bruce and Joan would like to share this tribute to our brother, Gary.

The **first candle** represents our grief. The pain of losing you is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for you. It reminds us of how many lives you have touched. And it reminds us of how quickly life can change.

This **second candle** represents our courage, to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, And to adjust our lives and go on without you.

The **third candle** we light in your memory. For the times we laughed, the times we cried, the times we were upset with each other, and the times we triumphed. It's for the amazing things you have done in your life, and the caring and joy you gave us.

The **fourth candle** we light for your gifts to the world, your dedication to science, and your tireless research. It's for your desire to make the world a better place. It's for the joy you found in nature and your profound belief that we are the stewards of the earth.

This **fifth candle** we light for our love. We light this candle so that your light will always shine. As we share this celebration of your life with our family and friends, we will cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living brought to each of us. We will always love you. We will always remember you.

THE BRISTLECONE PINE LYRICS

Way up in the mountains
On the high timberline
Lives a twisted old tree
Called the bristlecone pine
The wind there is bitter
It cuts like a knife
And it keeps that tree holding
On for dear life
But hold on it does
Standing its ground
Standing as empires
Rise and fall down

When Jesus was gathering
Lambs to his fold
This tree was already
A thousand years old
Now the way I have lived
There ain't no way to tell
When I die if I'm going
To heaven or hell
So when I'm laid to rest
It would suit me just fine
To sleep at the feet of
The bristlecone pine

For as I would slowly
Return to the earth
What little this body
Of mine might be worth
Would soon start to nourish
The roots of that tree
And it would partake of
The essence of me
And who knows but that as
The centuries turn
A small spark of me might
Continue to burn
As long as the sun did
Continue to shine
Down on the limbs of
The bristlecone pine

Now the way I have lived
There ain't no way to tell
When I die if I'm going
To heaven or hell
So when I'm laid to rest
It would suit me just fine
To sleep at the feet of
The bristlecone pine
To sleep at the feet of
The bristlecone pine

Michael Johnson 1992

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEalVBUaquw>

THE NINTH ELEGY (EXCERPT)

Rainer Maria Rilke

Why, if our time on earth could be
spent as laurel, its green darker than
all others, its leaves edged with
little waves (like the smile of a wind)—: then why do we
have to be human—and, avoiding destiny,
long for destiny?...

Oh not because happiness is,
that rash profit taken just prior to oncoming loss,
not out of curiosity, or to give practice to the heart,
reasons which would hold for the laurel too...

But because being here is so much, and everything
seems to need us in this fleeting world, and
strangely speaks to us. Us, the most fleeting. Once
for everything, only once. Once and no more. And we, too,
only once. Never again. But to have been here,
this once, if only this once:
to have been *of the earth* seems irrevocable.

We are *of the earth* and will return to it. Gary's Biotree Urn is made entirely of bamboo and other biodegradable materials. It can grow a tree from seeds or from a sapling. It will eventually compost and grow in the Adirondack Mountains of New York.



