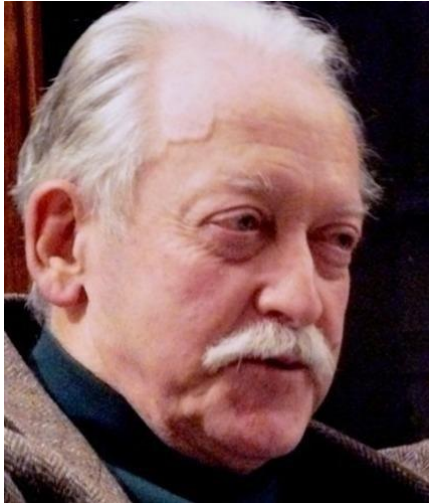


John J. Gaudet Obituary



John J. Gaudet of McLean, VA passed away on February 21, 2025 at the age of 93. He lived a wonderfully rich life - an academic, a respected development professional, a prolific author, a renaissance man with deep curiosity across many fields, loved by his friends as a bon vivant and captivating raconteur, and a beloved husband and family member – whether by blood, marriage, or choice. John brightened any room with his humor and intelligence.

John was born in Providence, RI. After serving in the US Army in the Korean War, John obtained Bachelors and Masters degrees from the University of Rhode Island and a PhD in ecology from the University of California/Berkley. He taught at Stony Brook University in New York, Makerere University in Uganda, and various universities in Kenya, and was awarded two Fulbright Scholarships, one in India and the other in Malaya. He was an acknowledged expert on botany and aquatic ecosystems in tropical and subtropical environments, with a focus on the papyrus plant.

John's scholarly research primarily focused on the dynamics of aquatic ecosystems, particularly in tropical and subtropical environments. His work has significantly contributed to the understanding of plant recruitment and genetic diversity in aquatic habitats. Throughout his academic career, John was published extensively, addressing critical issues such as nutrient relationships in African lakes and the impact of natural drawdown on wetland ecosystems. His studies have provided valuable insights into the management and conservation of aquatic resources, particularly in the context of human-induced changes and environmental challenges. Beyond his research, he was a gifted teacher and mentor to students and colleagues. Many of the ecologists active by the 1990s in East Africa were his students or mentees.

Joining USAID in 1982, he was one of its most distinguished environmental scientists, working throughout East and Southern Africa. He worked extensively in Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Madagascar, and developed innovative approaches to environmental assessments focused on developing local expertise instead of relying on overseas specialists. He also pioneered environmental assessments that were accurate but that could be immediately implemented. His work became the gold standard for practical environmental assessments and he was highly regarded throughout the development community.

Following his retirement, John (aka "Bwana Papyrus") discovered a passion for writing, authoring numerous books on papyrus, ecology, and natural history, as well as murder

mysteries and fictional pieces drawing from his family history in Acadia and his extensive travels throughout the world; he loved that his book "Papyrus" was a question on Jeopardy. His latest book (on the greening of the Sahara) is scheduled to be published in the fall.

John was a man of eclectic interests and everything that attracted him led to an intense, deep focus, be it James Joyce, Jane Austin, the American Civil War, the Crystal Palace (UK), China, locusts, papyrus or the politics of water shortage - whatever and whoever; when he had an interest he went all in. And he was blessed with a wonderfully wacky sense of fun, whether entertaining kids with a flying cow mobile, roasting cicadas for appetizers or something else unexpected.

John decided to learn how to cook authentic Italian cuisine, so he headed off to Bologna and Venice to attend cooking classes given by Marcella Hazan and from then on his dinner invitations were treasured. And because he always went all in, he commissioned art deco Mucha graphics for the ceiling of his dining room in Nairobi and offered matching menus with the same art. John loved to entertain, whether it be an Italian-themed dinner or a neighborhood pool party.

John is survived by his wife, Caroline, his sister, Mary, his sister-in-law, Susie, brother-in-law, Mike; his nephews, Kevin, Edward, Rob and Chris, his nieces, Sharon, Fiona, Sally and Anna, his godchildren, Madeleine, Rebecca and Ben, his first wife, Kathy Gaudet, and many great nephews and great nieces. John will be deeply missed and his memory will forever serve as an inspiration to all who knew him.

A service will be held at 11 a.m. on March 15, 2025 at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 4250 N. Glebe Road, Arlington, VA. In lieu of flowers, Caroline kindly requests that donations be made in John's memory to The Nature Conservancy or [The Parkinson's Foundation](#).