

Caring for Professor Jones (Life profile)

Personal

Prof Lawrence G Jones¹ was born in Scranton PA on 08 July 1922, an only child, the son of Fred and Gertrude (Williams) Jones.

He has no relatives closer than the third degree, and there has been no contact since the 1950s².



¹ original family nickname *Laurie*, common nickname *Larry*, but, in fact even I, who have known him for over forty-five years still call him *Professor Jones*, and my occasional personal nickname for him is *chief* from back when he used to be my boss.

My guess is that addressing him will work out as follows: fellow residents will wind up calling him *Larry*, and staff will call him *Professor Jones*.

² except recently when the family house was being sold and the distant cousin needed a certification that the mortgage given by Prof Jones has been paid off. Prof Jones did not even know who he was, and I wound up having to get them the paperwork they needed.

He grew up in a two-story wood frame house at 614 Electric St³ in Scranton.

The house, built by his grandfather, was originally on a large double-size lot, with a main entrance on the street and another behind at cellar level (built on a hill) and a large garden and orchard behind.



His father, who died in the early 1950s, was, I believe, a streetcar conductor, and his mother a homemaker, but one who had finished high school, about like college in those days. After the death of Mrs Jones in 1942 Prof Jones' father took up painting and became quite accomplished at it.⁴

Education

Local public schools in Scranton through high school, got a very good education there, especially loved French and English.

College at Lafayette, majored in English, senior thesis on Spencer's *Faerie queene*.

Drafted in to the Navy when a senior in college, and his mother died at about the same time.

Prof Jones studied Russian, French, German, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and used many other languages especially Slavic ones—he taught Czech, Polish, Church Slavonic, and Serbo-Croatian.

Military

Served in the Navy, training at Great Lakes, posting as chaplain's assistant at a base in Eastern Texas.

His prime responsibility was setting up chapels for services, being a secretary to the chaplains, and playing the organ.

Because he had learned some Russian in college, he was also detailed to be a kind of host-interpreter for Russian sailors who came to the base on some kind of military exchange.

He never saw combat.

³ Electric got renamed from Breaker St back when the first main electric runs was made down to the coal breakers at the bottom of the street. Prof Jones tells me that everything in Scranton used to be black from the coal dust, and even some old papers from the attic of the house, sent when the house was sold, were thick with coal. Now the house is white, but back then no house in Scranton was white.

⁴ Prof Jones gave most of the work to a local art association but he still has a few of them, which may eventually wind up in his room.

Employment and higher education

After the war studied Russian at Columbia (MA), then moved to Harvard with Prof Roman Jakobson, completed a PhD in Russian around 1952 with a dissertation in acoustic phonetics on the contextual variants of Russian vowels. ⁵

Taught linguistics at Northeastern and research projects with Cambridge Air Force Research Lab, then Lecturer in Linguistics and Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Harvard,

then hired at Boston College (1960?) to start the Program in Slavic Studies and the Program in Linguistics, which later became (1968?) the Department of Slavic & Eastern Languages under his chairmanship.

Also taught English for Foreign Students for many years for the Commission of Extension Courses at Harvard.

Retired from full-time teaching (Linguistics, Russian & Slavic languages & literatures, and Poetics).

Continued to teach seminars (Poetic theory; South and West Slavic languages) part-time at BC until around 2000.

Favorite poets were probably Emily Dickinson and Anna Akhmatova. ⁶

Traveled several times to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. ⁷

Spent a year on leave in Wales at the University of Cardiff. ⁸

Religious

Roman Catholic, devoutly so. Likes to watch daily Mass on television. ⁹

Will probably definitely want to be with any Rosary or Mass group.

Family were Christian Scientists but Prof Jones never particularly liked Christian Science and can get very sarcastic about it if prompted.

Became Episcopalian (high church) while in graduate school at Harvard. ¹⁰

Received into the Catholic church at St Paul's, Cambridge, in the early 70s (Bishop Boles).

Spouse & children

Never married, no children.

Might have married a fellow grad student, an admiral's daughter, but they were both interested in developing their careers first. She has now passed on, but I have not mentioned this to him.

Daily routine

Used to rise at 5.30 or so and went to bed fairly early (8-ish).

With age daily schedule became increasingly more erratic (up at 3am, sleep at 5pm, or up all night), over last few months, with care from home health aides (7am-9pm) keeps roughly those hours for a waking day, but still can get up earlier and be dressed when they arrive at 7am.

Breakfast: Loves oatmeal (w raisins). Tea is ok, used to like fine teas.

Avoid coffee—irritates bowel with predictable consequences, so beware.

Lunch/Dinner/Supper: anytime and will eat almost anything, enjoys eating good food and loves snacks. Likes tea, biscuits, all fine foods.

⁵ How the surrounding consonants affect the pronunciation of vowels in Russian, studied from analysis of speech spectrograms, a new technique in those days.

⁶ And, of course, Shakespeare, on whom he co-authored with Roman Jakobson a very important monograph called *Shakespeare's verbal art. in Th' expense of spirit.*

⁷ And was in Prague just before the Soviet forces marched in and crushed the Prague Spring (1968).

⁸ Very proud of his Welsh heritage.

⁹ 09.30 M-F on 68, 07.30 Sunday on 7

¹⁰ A fascinating story of a chance visit to a church which turned a sceptic into a believer.

No known food allergies or dislikes, but avoid coffee.

Naps during day, late AM, early PM, lies on bed and listens to music.

Showers daily, perhaps not part of his original regular routine, but not a bad idea, given urinary incontinence (from prostate cancer treatment).

Seems able to do morning and evening ablutions on his own, especially when prompted (increasingly more frequent).

Has beard (see photo), bald except for back of head. Can definitely use a good visit from a barber. Podiatrist also.

Daily routine

Used to get up early, go into Harvard Square for coffee & croissant, then by bus/T to BC (doesn't drive, never had a car or even rode a bicycle).

Used to jog for a while in the morning with a group of businessmen at the Cambridge Y.¹¹

Would leave BC in the late-mid afternoon, by bus/T to Harvard Square, would shop around, especially bookstores and music shops, maybe eat in the Square, then home and early to bed.

Later also enjoyed walking in Mt Auburn Cemetery.¹² Can no longer do this. Fell in 2004 on his way back from such a walk, and this marked the beginning of his decline.

After retiring from BC his ideal day involved going in to Harvard Sq early in the morning for coffee and croissant, shopping around a little, going back home, walking if possible, then going back in to St Paul's at noon for Mass, eating somewhere, usually Chinese, then back home and scanning videos which he had taped overnight.¹³

Daily routine now involves getting up at 6 or 7, washing/showering with assistance, getting dressed (selects own clothes), usually going into living room, sitting in a favorite chair, having breakfast brought by HHA¹⁴, lounging, watching Mass, usually napping in chair.

Lunch, maybe a nap in bedroom, listening to music, up again, dinner, bed, lots of sitting around and seeming to wish that he could be reading.

Occasional visitors¹⁵ but not enough social or cultural contact—poor mobility and stairs at his Cambridge residence made getting out a major undertaking.

Hobbies and interests

Poetry, music (classical), still appreciates jokes with a linguistic bent, especially puns¹⁶.

Had a good reading voice and used to be a lector at church (Sacred Heart/Watertown).

Doesn't really watch TV anymore, used to watch videos on tape but never warmed to DVDs and lacks the attention span now to follow a movie or program plot.

For a good while also would no longer listen to music at all¹⁷, and it took a simple BoseWave CD to get him back to listening to music, which comforts him even if he no longer really follows it closely.

He has a massive collection of CDs, and was collecting Händel operas and oratorios for a long time, but that is all unmaintained, and it became a job even to get him to put CDs back into a protective sleeve, let alone the original jewel box.

11 This was when he lived very near Harvard Square at 28 Mt Auburn St, next to St Paul's Rectory. After moving to Brattle St he stopped running.

12 Across from his house

13 He would tell me that this was what his day was like but, in fact, this was an idealized portrayal which in later years, we found out, was more wish than fulfillment.

14 Keeping him out of kitchen as much as possible to avoid accidents. Took also to taking frozen food from refrigerator and eating it uncooked.

15 An old friend from grad school days, a former student from BC, and myself and my wife are essentially his only company.

16 When my wife showed him an ocelot fur hat that her mother had given her, his immediate remark was "I bet an oss-a-lot coss-a-lot."

17 Perhaps because his expensive stereos became too complicated for him to operate.

I believe if you ask him what he is listening to, he will no longer be able to tell you, but he's enjoying it, so I don't ask.

He used to have two Burmese cats which he took off someone who was leaving for overseas, and before that a regular cat, but that is in the distant past, and if you mentioned Obie and Celise, or Josephine, he probably wouldn't recognize the names.

Personality

Very mild-mannered and much gentler than his sometimes stern appearance.

Has a lovely smile (teeth need checking if a dentist comes by).

If angered (rare) will show it by steaming, and voice register changes noticeably, but passes quickly.

Had reports of temper tantrums with one HHA, but this may have been due to undiplomatic or provocative handling on her part. I have personally never seen him violent.

Had problems with alcohol in the fifties but through AA (and an interesting 'conversion' incident) has not had any difficulties since. Abstains completely. Became a sponsor for numerous AA problem types.

Used to smoke until the early sixties. Stopped when he began jogging, hasn't smoked since.

Had problems with eyes (cataracts, detached retina), has one corneal implant.

Quadruple bypass cardiac surgery around 1993.

Prostate cancer in late 1990s, radiation therapy at Mt Auburn. Urinary incontinence since then.

Copes usually by retreating into self.

Dislikes artificial and exaggerated behavior, especially what he calls 'premeditated joy' but does appreciate a truly dramatic-style flair if someone displays it.

Still has a sense of humor, to the extent that his memory loss permits.

Friends who may come to visit besides my wife and myself:

Tom Ormond, former student from BC in early 60s. Was also my assistant at Harvard teaching English to Foreign Students. Has been a loyal friend.

Sam De Merit, retired Latin teacher from Boston Latin, was a graduate student at the same time as Prof Jones, and they lived in the same house on Irving Street along with a colorful assortment of other graduate students. Visits in Cambridge on a weekly basis, but doesn't have a car, so may have difficulty traveling somewhere away from the T.

John Ahearn, an acquaintance from St Paul's through Sam De Merit, occasionally comes to bring communion.

John Gavin, a Jesuit priest and former student, or Tim Gavin, also a former student.

Might also get an occasional phone call from Caroline Attenborough, wife of a now deceased Episcopal priest (Fr Alan Attenborough †2005), living in upstate New York. Fr Attenborough grew up in Scranton with Prof Jones. Mrs Attenborough still keeps in touch.

(Prof) M.J. Connolly
close colleague, power of attorney, health proxy