

John Smith McKenzie Jr.

Died: February 26, 2010

“Jay,” as he was known, died Monday, February 22, 2010 in Moorestown, New Jersey. He was 70 years old.

He grew up in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania,, and went to William Penn Charter School, a private Quaker friends school in Philadelphia. He was on the school magazine, the yearbook, sang in the glee club, and was in dramatics there. He played tennis and was manager of both the soccer and wrestling teams.

At Dartmouth Jay majored in psychology and was in The Players his last three years, becoming both personnel and business manager his senior year.

After graduation from Dartmouth, Jay went to Princeton Theological Seminary, where he earned his bachelor of divinity (BD) degree, and a master’s degree in theology (ThM). He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister.

Our classmate Art Bloom knew him during the succeeding years. Jay “served as a youth minister for several years, and then retired to be a caregiver to his mother and uncle,” Art wrote in an In Memoriam remembrance published online.

After his mother and uncle died, Jay remained in the home, said Art, “cherishing his memories of Dartmouth (particularly the Dartmouth Players), following the lives of the members of the British royal family (he attended Queen Elizabeth's coronation as a boy and also her 50th anniversary celebration), enjoying summers at Cape May (where he befriended the local squirrels), and attending the Miss America pageant.”

Jay suffered from serious health issues, which among other adverse effects occasioned him great stress. To relieve his own stress, he got to know park squirrels, and wrote about getting to know squirrels as a method for reducing stress. He recommended it to others in the Reflection he wrote for our 40th Reunion in 2001.

“Get to know squirrels. I mean really get to know them,” he wrote, admonishing the reader to learn their names, their unique personalities, the squirrel world power structure and who’s the alpha male, and so forth.

“Learn to live with the fact that everything in the relationship” between you and the squirrel “is totally on the squirrel’s terms,” he wrote. “You can do nothing but be there (with some goodies), and let them teach you. Trust is something that grows slowly. Invest the patience. Personally, I grew to realize that park squirrels can be the best therapists in the world, and, making them even more delightful, they work for peanuts.”

Art Bloom picks up the narrative of the last years of Jay's life.

"About twenty years ago," Art wrote, Jay "took a long-planned trip around the world. His health began to decline but just as he was becoming more homebound, he discovered the web and began making friends all over the world. One of them, a man named Arthur Walker, had many of the same physical problems as Jay and eventually moved into Jay's home in Moorestown New Jersey. The two men became long time companions and Arthur's problems allowed Jay to renew his interest in life, take charge of issues involving health care, social workers, insurance etc. The two men lived together until Jay's death, and Arthur will remain in Jay's home."

Art closed his remembrance with these words: "Jay finally found someone to share his life with, someone to love. After many years of intense physical suffering, Jay is no longer in pain, and he finally found what he needed. I remember him fondly."