

Dan James, who served as the IWCS president from 2003 to 2004, passed away on 2 May 2014. Dan's wife, Romaleta, shared several stories about Dan's lifetime love of wood and trees. Jerry Davidson, Dan's friend since college, also provided some stories of their travels together.

Dan was very active in many organizations, but according to Romaleta, "Dan loved IWCS the most and enjoyed talking about wood to everyone he met." Dan was a member of the Alabama Forest Owners, Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Society, and state president of the Alabama Treasure Forest Association. Dan had a passion for educating others in the importance of knowing what trees you have on your land and their different characteristics. He led tree identification walks for the Alabama Forest Owners Association, and was an invited lecturer at all of the organizations he belonged to. Dan rarely passed on an opportunity to talk about his favorite topic. Through the years, the James' have hosted over 30 workshop forest tours on their property. The Natural Resources Conservation Services (formerly the US Soil Conservation Service) will be holding a 3-day workshop in August on their farm.

Dan and Romaleta joined IWCS after meeting IWCS member, George Hamner in 1995. George was looking for dwarf chinkapin oak for his specimen collection and heard that Dan had a large grove of these trees. Dwarf chinkapin oaks produce a small, sweet acorn. George invited the James' to attend the 1995 annual IWCS meeting held in Columbus, Indiana, where the James' met most of the Indiana members and fell in love with IWCS. Dan became more energized about trees and wood during the meeting, came back to his farm and "tore up a hay field" to plant persimmons, black walnuts, and varieties of maple and chestnut (in addition to all of the land he already had in timber). Dan planted the trees with an eye towards providing food for the wildlife on his property. He embraced the concept of ecosystem management, often replacing a harvested tree with the same species in the same location.

Several years ago, the James' attended a University of Georgia symposium



on sawtooth oak (*Quercus acutissima*) introduced from China. The tree is a prodigious acorn producer; however, the University was not ready to offer seedlings to the general public. During one of the session breaks, a faculty member mentioned a sawtooth oak on campus was dropping acorns. Dan nudged Romaleta and asked her to get out there and harvest some acorns. Romaleta spent 2 hours picking up acorns while the meeting continued. They brought the treasures back to their farm, where Dan planted 40 acres of the trees. Six years later, the trees stand 12 feet tall, and provide an abundant amount of sweet acorns for the wildlife.

Several years ago, Dan and Romaleta befriended Hongwen Huang, a Chinese doctoral student at Auburn University. Dan sold him a 1986 Honda for one dollar, so he could have reliable transportation to perform his research on chestnut trees. After Dr. Huang graduated with his doctorate in horticulture, he returned the car to the James' in exchange for the original dollar. Dr. Huang has served in several prestigious positions in the Chinese academic community and has maintained contact with the James' through the years. The James' visited Dr. Huang in China in 1999 and again in 2006, and traveled to many of the major cities.

Jerry Davidson and Dan were Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity brothers and roommates in college. Jerry told me Dan's uncles purchased a brand new Plymouth Fury for Dan, so he had reliable transportation to drive home on the weekends to operate the cotton gin on the family farm. Dan graduated from Alabama Poly Technical Institute in 1959, with a degree in Animal Husbandry and Agronomy. The following year, the university changed its name to Auburn University. Jerry graduated with a forestry degree in 1960 and his diploma shows Auburn University.

Jerry always said Dan knew way more about trees and forestry than he ever did, even though Jerry had the forestry degree! After graduation, Dan joined his two uncles in operating the 3,000 acre (1,214 hectare) family farm, raising row crops, cotton, timber and cattle. Dan and Jerry saw each other a few times while Jerry was a pilot in the US Marine Corps. After 22 years in the Marine Corps, Jerry retired and returned home to Alabama, vowing to stay close to home. Dan had other ideas for his friends, and cajoled Jerry and his wife, Jackie, into attending an IWCS Southeast Regional meeting at Lake Yale, Florida, even paying for the Davidson's IWCS membership fee. Jerry was "hooked" once he saw all of the interesting people, projects and wood at the meeting. Lake Yale was the start of the 2 couples traveling to many IWCS meetings together (sort of). The husbands drove in one van and the wives drove in the other van. Romaleta said the guys would get so involved in discussions while driving, they would often miss their turns. The couples would stay off of the interstate roads and enjoy driving through the countryside. Romaleta claims they used the location of the sun in the sky at times to get to the Tacoma Washington meeting in 2003.

Dan frequently led grace at the community meals during IWCS meetings. Romaleta shared a story I did not know about Dan. Every Sunday for the past 30 years, Dan taught Sunday school to the inmates at the Bibb County Alabama jail. The attendees came and went through the years, and many got their lives back on track. A few former inmates even became preachers. Dan was also a member of the Gideons, a Christian

group who purchase and distribute bibles to hotels, churches, schools, prisons, hospitals, and medical offices.

An interesting story Romaleta and Jerry shared was that Dan had his own coffin built 25 years ago. At the time, Dan lost two aunts and two uncles during that year. Dan told Romaleta he wanted to be buried in a wooden coffin and not a metal one. To ensure his wishes were followed, Dan cut down a cypress tree on his property, sawed and dried the boards, then commissioned a friend to make the coffin. The finished coffin was stored in the James' spare bedroom for the past 25 years. Romaleta always wanted to store comforters in it, but Dan was concerned she would have nowhere to put them once he needed to use it. At Dan's funeral, his coffin was decorated with a wooden hat, a wreath made of wooden items, a

walking stick, and two panels carved by a friend, Ivan Krongberg. About 12 years ago, Ivan told Romaleta he was going to start carving.

Romaleta offered to buy whatever he made. Ivan made 2 raised panels of dogwood, carved with dogwood leaves, berries and stems. The James' thought the panels were too beautiful to keep in their home, so they donated them to the US Forest Service building, which is adjacent to their property. The Forest Service rangers proudly displayed the panels in their office. When the rangers heard of Dan's passing, they brought the panels to place on his coffin. Romaleta returned the panels to the rangers after Dan's funeral, so all of the future visitors could see the beautiful treasures that come from wood.

As he got older, Dan would often talk

to Romaleta about how sad he was that he was not as strong as he used to be, and many of his dear friends had passed. Romaleta would remind him, "Look at all the fun you had when you were young!" Dan would always answer, "Yes, we did!" When I spoke to her, Romaleta mentioned many, many individual IWCS members by name who meant so much to Dan. Dan's life-long friend, Jerry added, "Dan was a fine individual," probably one of the most succinct compliments any of us would cherish. Dan's life was filled with good friends, family and people he touched through his passion for wood and living a life helping others. Dan rests now in the Bibb County Alabama Bethel Baptist Cemetery.



Dan on the left at the sawmill during the 2013 Lake Yale meeting