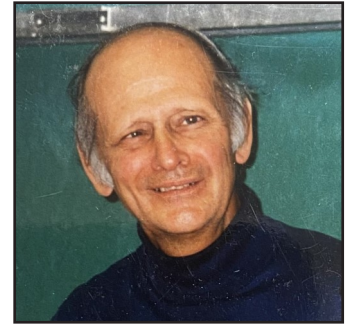


In Memoriam: Walter J. Canzonier
February 6, 1936 - June 21, 2021

Walter Canzonier, NSA Wallace Awardee, passed Monday June 21, 2021. His life was dedicated to helping the shellfish industry. Walt was a bit eccentric as The Short Fat Red-Haired Guy (TSFR-HG) from Bivalve-sur-Maurice or Old Weird Walt (OWW) from Manasquan-sur-Mer. It was a ruse, along with the greeting ‘how’s the garugala’, that he used to eliminate affectations and pretentiousness. He was not impressed by degrees or positions. He cared about helping people learn and understand science and history so that they could be successful. He helped fishermen and farmers produce shellfish sustainably and profitably. He cared about public health, particularly when it involved shellfish. And he insisted that regulations be supported by scientific evidence - ‘show me the data’ he would exclaim.



Walt spent much of his career at Rutgers and the evolution of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, conducting research, designing equipment, and designing the lab itself. As a graduate student of Hal Haskin, he helped identify MSX as the cause of sudden widespread oyster mortality. But Rutgers rejected his fluency in Italian to meet a foreign language requirement because there was ‘not enough science published in Italian’. So, Walt moved to Chioggia, Italy, took a position at a marine lab and began publishing his research in Italian. After a decade helping marine labs and shellfish programs across Europe, he moved back to New Jersey. His impact is not easily quantifiable in publications, grants obtained, and policies developed. It is quantified in the people he helped. John Kraeuter, NSA Past-President, Wallace Awardee and Associate Director of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory best summed it up:

“It is really, really, really difficult to capture the unique individual that was Walt Canzonier. Walt was a true Renaissance individual. In addition to science (ecology, analytical chemistry, histology, bacteriology, algal and bivalve culture, and basic biology of most marine/estuarine organisms), he was remarkably knowledgeable about the history of New Jersey, Rutgers University, the New Jersey Experiment Station, the Jersey Shore, Delaware Bay and its oyster community, ATT, locations of old train lines serving NJ and the Jersey Shore, the origin of many of the rules and regulations on shellfish in NJ (and many other states), and those issues covered by the ISSC. In addition, he could tell you about the history of most mechanical and electrical devices and could repair most of them including autoclaves, boilers, anything electrical, small gas and diesel engines, and even make parts he needed by machining them. I remember learning about the glass industry in NJ, the origin of Wheaton Glass Company, coupled with an aside on the reason for the different shapes of glass milk bottles. Oh, yes, he was also an accomplished carpenter and plumber, and I’m sure I missed other things he was able to construct, repair, or design.”

Most of all, Walt had a strong desire to help everyone who would expend some effort to learn. He took nearly everyone he met under his tutelage, and everyone was better for it. Walt invariably helped students, visiting professionals and others at the Haskin lab and elsewhere. Not only did he help with the science, but he helped finding equipment stored in various places around the lab or making something to do the job. He assisted with finding places to stay and helped with all sorts of paperwork (taxes, visas, grant rules and regulations, etc. etc.). Within the shellfish community, Walt helped the nearby New Jersey shellfish businesses, but was also on the phone or in person, assisting in the broad area from Massachusetts to the Carolinas and beyond, regularly attending many arduous ISSC meetings. In the 25 years I was at the Haskin Lab, Walt did all of this and worked around the lab and with numerous individuals in the Delaware Bay shellfish community - gratis. All he asked was that you learned, not just the answer to your question, but its history and how to think about solving problems. In addition, he was a great editor and would not allow vagueness, poor word choice, poor punctuation, or other grammatical errors. If you used a word incorrectly, you would receive a comment about the etymology of the word, the difference between what you said and the proper use of the word or phrase, and what to substitute.

The ubiquity of Walt’s desire to help and his unique persona can be summed up by Eric Powell describing a trip that included several marine labs in Europe shortly after he became Director of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory. Eric said it didn’t matter where he was, after it became known that he was from the Haskin Lab, the first question asked was “How’s Walt?”. Walt was one-of-a-kind and the shellfish industry, particularly in NJ, will be much diminished without his presence and help. I know I will miss him.

For anyone that may have never understood what a garugala is, Walter kept this definition framed in his office: *“The Garugala, of course, is the thing that you keep in your house for entertainment, just for entertainment. If your house is large enough, you may retain several “Garugale” (note the proper pluralization, never garugalas), one in each room. It is composed of a variety of components, both physical and metaphysical in nature, and it comes in a number of forms; there are even 40 cm models for small children. It is fabricated, usually but not always, of a bit of this and a bit of that, a bit of allegria and a bit of fantasia, properly commingled and adjoined. It may be finished in various colours, and it is most common to change the colour on an annual basis. It is strictly for entertainment. The word is frequently mispronounced as garugalla; but this is certainly quite incorrect, being a dialectical term used in Roma and elsewhere. For proper operation and prolonged service, the “Garugala” requires some periodic maintenance; in very damp, especially foggy, weather one must apply a few drops of oil to critical points. This is preferably done at about 0600 every Sunday morning. It is best to use imported olive oil, extra virgine if available. It is often said that the “Garugala” originated in the ancient and elegant city of Chioggia, Italia NE, during a chance encounter of a group of scemi della Finanza with a weird eclectic from the west (hence the term OWW). – TSFR-HG 13/12/90”*

More of Walt’s accomplishments can be found at the NSA website. Walt was 85 when he passed. Keep an eye on the Garugala!

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