



James W. Lillie

January 17, 2026

James W. Lillie, Jr., known to family and friends as Jay, passed away January 17, 2026, leaving a legacy defined by intellect, curiosity, and an unquenchable sense of adventure. A devoted husband and father, a prize-winning essayist, and an accomplished international lawyer, Jay lived a life that was as expansive as the seas he loved to sail.

Born in Toms River, New Jersey, in 1931, Jay spent his formative years on his grandfather Prendergast's farm in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. It was among those rolling hills and open skies that he first discovered his love for trout fishing, skating, skiing, and horses—pursuits that remained lifelong passions.

Jay's extraordinary seamanship was forged early, racing his Snipe on Barnegat Bay, and later refined as an officer in the United States Navy. Navigating Navy destroyers instilled in him the sharp judgment and discipline of a seasoned mariner, qualities he later brought to the world of competitive ocean racing. A fixture in the sailing community, Jay successfully competed in multiple Newport-Bermuda and Marion-Bermuda Races, always at home on the open water.

Professionally, Jay was a man of academic and legal rigor. A graduate of the Wharton School and the University of Pennsylvania Law School, he built a

distinguished career as an international attorney in New York City, earning acclaim for his intellect and judgment. Upon retiring from the law, Jay returned to his love of language. His wit and imagination found a new outlet in writing; he became a prize-winning essayist and novelist, dedicating his later years to the craft of storytelling.

Jay's life was a voyage defined by devotion—to his family, his friends, and his many passions. Jay was a very good man, who never hesitated to help out and always did so with a smile. He leaves behind a legacy of courage, joy, and an enduring curiosity that will continue to inspire all who knew him.

Jay is survived by his beloved wife, Inger; his stepdaughter, Brigitte; and his five children: Lydia, James, Derek, Brooke, and Alexandra. He was predeceased by his son, Christopher. His spirit of adventure and intellect lives on in his 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that consideration for donations be made in his name to Tunnels to Towers at [Tunnels to Towers www.t2t.org](http://www.t2t.org).

Tribute Wall

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“ It has been my genuine pleasure to know and be a friend of Jay for over 30 years. We met at a NC Disputes Resolution Commission meeting. We both were approved mediators.I must say that I have never known anyone who impressed me more. Jay was a highly intelligent man, and certainly the brightest attorney I have known during my lifetime. I will miss Jay, but I feel so blessed to have known him.

Bob Southerland - January 21 at 01:54 PM