

# In Memorial: James M. Becker — September 2, 1919—November 18, 2016

By Linda Wojtan



A tireless champion for international understanding, often cited as the “Father of Global Education,” James M. Becker (Jim) passed away at age ninety-seven. He is survived by his four children, seven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. Professor emeritus at Indiana University’s School of Education, Jim was extolled by many at a memorial service January 28, 2017, at the education building. Friends and family recounted numerous academic accomplishments, as well as a wicked sense of humor, accompanied by an open heart and mind.

Raised on a dairy farm in Rice County, Minnesota, he managed the farm for a while, served as a tank commander in the 736<sup>th</sup> tank battalion in World War II, and later earned BS and MA degrees from the University of Minnesota. A fellowship at Columbia University followed a teaching stint at Winona State Teachers College. Later, while teaching at Illinois State University, he accepted a position at the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCA) as director of their Foreign Relations Project. After a decade, he became national director of school services for the Foreign Policy Association (FPA) based in New York City. His work, including the publications from these and other projects, contributed to innova-

tive approaches often referred to as “the revolution in social studies.”

In 1971, Jim accepted a position at Indiana University’s Social Studies Development Center, where he later became director and retired. While at IU, he directed projects such as the Mid-America Program in Global Perspectives in Education, the International Studies in Schools Project, and many others. He directed the binational Japan/US Textbook Study, reporting findings in the publication *In Search of Mutual Understanding*. Subsequent publications, *In Search of Mutual Understanding: A Classroom Approach* and *Parallel Passages: Contrasting Views from US and Japan*, applied the findings to the classroom. Jim also directed the Midwest Program for Teaching about Japan and chaired the advisory board for the National Clearinghouse for US–Japan Studies.

Jim shared his expertise with wide-ranging projects and organizations—a sampling includes the US Department of Education Global Education Task Force; the Longview Foundation; the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Associated Schools Project; the Ford Foundation; the Kettering Foundation; and the Atlantic Information Centre for Teachers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He edited the seminal *Schooling for a Global Age*, which provided extensive evidence of increased global interrelatedness, as well as accelerated transnational interactions. This work was later expanded and updated in *Goals, Needs, and Priorities in International Education*, written by Jim and colleague Lee Anderson for the US Office of Education Study in 1969.

His autobiography, *An Ordinary Man’s Extraordinary Journey*, yields a glimpse into his life, including his singular contributions to education and citizenship. Hailing from the Heartland, he references Rene DuBois’s “persistence of place”—affirming its role in his life. Musing on rural life, he acknowledges “the marvels of nature, the mystery of seeds, and the continuing renewal of life.” The work also contains many of his poems, ranging from observations on farming to military service to courtship.

In 1991, Indiana Governor Evan Bayh bestowed on Jim the Sagamore of the Wabash honor, the state’s highest civilian award. Since 2003, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has awarded the annual Award for Global Understanding in honor of James M. Becker. Following the death of his wife, Dr. Anna Ochoa-Becker, in 2013, he endowed an international travel fellowship in the IU School of Education in her memory.

The following excerpt from one of Jim’s last publications, *Globalization and Global Education: Ever the Twain Shall Meet?* (2002), is both reflective and prescient:

*A major challenge of the new millennium is to develop the international dimension of education to correspond to the realities of the globally interrelated and diverse world . . . Globalization has come about much faster than many of the forecasters in the '60s and '70s predicted . . . Only by making international global studies an integral part of the curriculum can schools hope to meet today’s challenge of preparing students for effective citizenship in an economically integrated but politically divided world.*

Jim’s work continues to enlighten and challenge us. I am honored, humbled, and greatly enriched to have known him as both a colleague and friend. ■