

# Garrett & Jane Hardin

## *Remembered by their activist neighbors in Santa Barbara*

by Diana Hull and Linda Thom

**T**he population reduction and environmental movement has lost two of its giants, Garrett James Hardin and wife Jane Hardin, on September 14.

Garrett Hardin, professor emeritus at UC Santa Barbara, was the author of 27 books and over 350 articles. He was originally trained as an ecologist and microbiologist and brought his original and meticulously reasoned ideas to the environmental and population movements. "The Tragedy of the Commons" – a widely regarded contribution to ecology, population theory, economics and political science introduced the idea that human misery would increase greatly if we do not recognize that livable space on Earth is finite. Referring to natural resources, he believed we had a right to give away our own possessions, but not those of posterity.

Garrett was the bravest of men because he said many true but unpopular things. In a crowded world, he said, we need the ecological concept of "carrying capacity" if we are to minimize suffering in the long run. He thought Western man had pretty well locked himself into a suicidal course by clinging to a "time blind" ethical principle – the absolute sanctity of life. He also questioned "promiscuous" philanthropy believing that it

often did more harm than good in the long term.

His most controversial books were *Living on a Lifeboat*, and *The Limits of Altruism: An ecologist's view of survival*. Garrett's interest in immigration developed from the idea that the "lifeboat" of the West is filled with the equivalent of family members – and that kinship altruism is the source of moral behavior. Both extend the idea that resources shared in common are exploited by some, whenever there is either crowding or conditions of scarcity.

Hardin often pointed out that the sentimental path was often at odds with the ethical one.

He was questioning the wisdom of mass immigration more than 20 years ago, calling "distributive justice" a ruinous system and described why this was so important in a series of articles and books. The Hardins were founders of CAPS (Californians for Population Stabilization) and remained close to the organization for the rest of their lives.

They were also dedicated to population stabilization through both family planning and reduced immigration. Garrett was a member of the Board of Directors, (later emeritus) of the Federation for American Immigration Reform. They were also longtime supporters of Planned Parenthood.

Some of Professor Hardin's other books include: *Mandatory Motherhood: The True Meaning of 'Right to Life'*, *The Ostrich Factor: Our Population Myopia*, *Stalking the Wild Taboo*, and *Creative Altruism: An Ecologist Questions Motives*. Hardin has received many awards for his work, and the Garrett Hardin Society is an organization formed to preserve his ideals and teachings.

In a 2002 tribute by George M. Woodell, Director of the Woods Hole Research Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, he described Garrett as someone he had admired for virtually his entire career as a scientist. Garrett Hardin, he said "has framed the arguments on environment and government, human rights and ethics,

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**Linda Thom** is a retiree who fled north from California three years ago. She formerly worked as an officer for a major bank and as a budget analyst for the County Administrator of Santa Barbara.

for three generations.”

Garrett Hardin was 88, and Jane Hardin was 81. The couple is survived by their four children.

DIANA HULL, PH.D.

CAPS (Californians for Population Stabilization)

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On a September Sunday, Garrett and Jane Hardin committed suicide. I cried, not for them but for me. Garrett and Jane got my thinking straight on overpopulation. They lived what they believed. I have never met such environmentally conscious people.

Garrett and Jane lived simply. For example, they collected rainwater for drinking. Jane gardened and preserved and composted. Jane told me they didn't subscribe to the *Los Angeles Times* because it generated too much waste advertising newsprint and the Earth would be better if fewer people subscribed.

She knitted wool socks for Garrett and we shared patterns. Jane believed in Garrett and she took care of his many personal needs – he was crippled by polio as a child – to allow him to write and think and influence thousands, including me.

Since I was in the eighth grade, I have worried about overpopulation. I read an article in *Time* magazine about India's population problem and the efforts of the government to help people control family size by instructing on the rhythm method. I wasn't exactly sure what that was but I was sure that keeping babies from entering the world and then starving was the right thing to do.

In college I majored in economics and heard that nations should make huge capital investments in infrastructure to reduce family size. According to economic thinking, when folks get money, they quit having children. I couldn't figure this out. Let's see, "Not tonight honey, they are building a dam on the Nile, don't you know." In my simple twenty-year-old mind, people would have more children if they felt prosperous and not fewer.

Despite my misgivings about this thinking, my heart overwhelmed my mind and I felt that sending billions in foreign aid to save the teeming masses would be the best course. I moved to Santa Barbara where Garrett and Jane lived. In the 1970s, I attended a lecture on overpopulation by Garrett. Bam, pow, whap, no mercy for the bleeding hearts. In a crowded lifeboat, taking on the drowning people in the water will only result in death

for all. If some in the lifeboat feel guilty, then they should get out and give their place to others. Those in the lifeboat who wanted to live should not be compelled to commit suicide.

The best way to redistribute wealth was not to drain the rich nations to save the poor but rather to help reduce the number of people in the next generation so that fewer could have more. Numbers matter in an environmentally finite world.

According to Garrett, overpopulation is cruel because Mother Nature's answer is brutal. People must work to agree on a method of controlling their prolific ways. He echoed the theme of Malthus that overpopulation leads to death from starvation and disease or from conflict with others fighting for survival. It's nature's way and the proof is everywhere around us in the world.

Garrett's views caused consternation among Christians, Liberals, immigration-enthusiasts and just plain folks on the street. But numbers matter. In our world, five billion people could benefit economically by moving to America. Four billion have lower incomes than our most numerous immigrant groups, Mexicans. Three billion have inadequate food. We cannot save the world by moving millions to America and we will commit suicide if we try.

Garrett administered tough love. I will miss both Jane and Garrett because they loved life and never gave up hope that folks would eventually get it right.

LINDA THOM

Coupeville, Washington

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