



## John Michael Lawler

February 12, 1942 - November 25, 2023

John Michael Lawler, an irreverent, compassionate and inspiring professor of linguistics, died at age 81 in Bellingham, WA, on November 25, 2023. The oldest of six children of Edward Michael and Agnita Lawler of DeKalb, IL, he leaves behind his partner of 25 years, Kate Birr, his two children and two grandchildren: Alexandra (Sasha) Lawler and her son, Hunter Lawler of Ann Arbor, MI; and Ian Lawler, daughter-in-law Jennifer Lawler, and their son Alexander Lawler of Prosper, TX, five siblings, and his former wife Sally Haines of Ann Arbor. John and Kate dated in high school, married other people, had kids, and lost track of each other for more than 30 years before finding each other again, making them both feel very lucky.

An Eagle Scout and National Merit Scholar, John earned a PhD in linguistics at the University of Michigan, where he taught for 37 years, winning a Fulbright fellowship—which he spent in Malaysia—and three Excellence in Education teaching awards. He was interested principally in undergraduate education and with making a permanent place for linguistics, especially English grammar, in primary and secondary schools. His students and colleagues loved him, as evidenced by their comments on his Facebook page and on the Stack Exchange, English Language & Usage.

John was an early adopter of computer technology, developing software for teaching linguistics and eventually his own still-live website, <https://websites.u>

[mich.edu/~jlawler/](http://mich.edu/~jlawler/), which has links to his many publications and, wonderfully for posterity, answers to 1,695 questions (!) about English, which he took great pleasure in fielding. He loved cooking, eating, science, and science fiction and sharing these passions with his friends and colleagues.

His favorite author was Terry Pratchett, who once wrote that “The span of someone’s life is only the core of their actual existence... No one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die down.” To which one of John’s friends responded in recent days that “It makes me truly glad to know that for John that time will be a long time coming.”

In lieu of flowers please consider donating to the Bellingham Food Bank.