

# *From Chasing Rabbits to Setting Records: The Amazing Story of Larry James*

*By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber*



**Fairview, New York, 1954**

A seven year old boy and his mother are traveling to his Aunt's house. When they arrive, the boy notices a neighborhood resident with two large beautiful hunting dogs going into a field in search of rabbits. The boy asks his mother, "Mom, can I go with him? The mother replies, "I have to ask Mr. Simmons." (giving the name of the man) (Mr. Simmons agrees)

Mr. Simmons and the boy travel into the field with the dogs. The boy notices a rabbit and points it out to Mr. Simmons. Mr. Simmons alerts his dogs who begin to sniff for the scent of the rabbit. Before the dogs have even caught the scent, the boy takes off like a rocket and catches the rabbit (personal communication from Ms. Martha James, on 3/26/19).

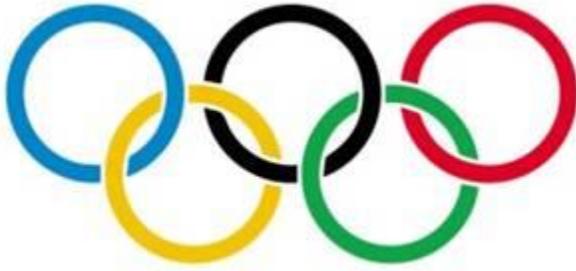
The seven year old boy in this story is Larry James, an American Olympic Gold and Silver Medalist in track, and the first African American in both categories from the State of New York

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/sports/othersports/08james.html>). This story was given to us in a personal interview with Larry's mother, Ms. Martha James, on March 26, 2019.

Larry James was born on November 6, 1947 in Mount Pleasant (<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/sports/othersports/08james.html>). He attended White Plains High School. His ambition in high school was to play football, but a close friend of his who was on the football team said, "Larry, you are not a football player, you are better off on the track team" (personal communication from Ms. Martha James, on 3/26/19).

Following this friend's advice, he tried out for the track team, easily qualified, and set many records thereafter. He earned the nickname "Mighty Burner" (personal communication from Ms. Martha James, on 3/26/19). After graduation from White Plains High School, he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Villanova University. While there, he continued to excel at track and was nominated for the Olympic Trials which were held in Echo Summit, California. He qualified for the U.S. Olympic team when he ran a time of 44.1 seconds, placing second to Lee Evans, who became his teammate at the Olympics and close friend (<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/sports/othersports/08james.htm>).

**Mexico City, Mexico 1968**



At the age of 21, the 6-foot 155 pound Larry James, entered the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. There, he earned a silver medal in the 400 meter with a time of 43.9 seconds and a gold medal in the 4x400m relay with a time of 2 minutes and 56 seconds (<https://www.olympic.org/larry-james>). This was a world record which was not broken until 1992. From 1973 until 2001, he served as the athletic director of Stockton College. He passed away on November 6, 2008, at the age of 61, due to colon cancer (<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/sports/othersports/08james.htm>) but his legacy, which is preserved in Stockton College 's Larry James Scholarship fund and the "Mighty Burner" Speed Camp for training young athletes, will live on forever.



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## About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

### **Riley Wentzler:**

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at [assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com](mailto:assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com), or to help me find employment, you can contact me at [rjwentzler413@gmail.com](mailto:rjwentzler413@gmail.com)**

### **Felicia Barber:**

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at [assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com](mailto:assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com). To learn more about my artwork or to help me find employment you can contact me at [feliciadbarber@gmail.com](mailto:feliciadbarber@gmail.com).**

**Two Interviews with the authors:**

<https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/a-love-of-history-and-each-other/13708/>

<https://wcbs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-manytalents-town-greenburgh>

## References

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