

A GENTLE GIANT IS GONE

“Cancelled Historian”'s column

As time marches on relentlessly, people, including dear friends, relatives, and unique individuals come and go. In the IT Society we are unfortunately getting used to mourn more and more of our passing colleagues lately. The great Claude himself was one of the first to go. And then there were other giants like Tom Cover, Jim Massey, Jack Wolf, Toby Berger, and numerous others. Sadly, fate took away recently one more of the exceptional individuals who have adorned our Society and our field. Don Snyder.

Don, was not only one of the pioneers in many aspects of Detection and Estimation Theory, as well as Information Theory. He was an amazingly modest man with an unobtrusive manner and self-effacing personality that set him apart. Perhaps for this reason he may not be as well known by many as some of our other leaders. He was among the first to familiarize us with the theory of point processes through his landmark book that was published in the '70's. He quietly rose in the ranks of our Society and became President early on. I recall when, as President, he announced the newly elected IEEE Fellows from our Society at a banquet, he left himself out although he was also one of those just elected. And it was Lee Davisson who loudly yelled: "...and Don Snyder!", after Don finished reading their names. And the audience rewarded him with a hearty applause.

I was among those lucky enough to have known him early on. I had invited him at the University of Maryland in the early seventies to give a lecture and I was impressed by his kind and considerate attitude towards me and my colleagues. His lecture was exemplary. Clear, informative, impressive, and, above all, a talk that set a high standard for the future. My last email communication with him took place only a few weeks ago.

Among his many doctoral students I single out Prakash Narayan who has been my colleague and friend for several decades and George Georgiades, another good friend, who, like Prakash, has carried the torch lit by Don in our Society.

His contributions were many and diverse. Maximum likelihood methods in imaging stand out. He led by example and was one of the human pillars of our Society that are now becoming increasingly scarce. Don had also many other hidden skills that few of us knew about. Dick Blahut mentioned to me Don's craftsmanship in building sundials that could tell the time through the polarization of light.

But above all, Don had an amiable persona that radiated kindness, compassion, optimism, good will, integrity, professionalism, and dedication to his work, his family, his students, and his colleagues. He was a rare human being. He joined our other great colleagues in the Pantheon of our field. We will miss him and we will be guided by his legacy.

Have a smooth journey, Don! You have made a difference for many of us.

Anthony Ephremides