

OBITUARY

WALTER WOELBER DALQUEST: 1917–2000



Walter Woelber Dalquest, Emeritus Professor of Biology at Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, Texas (Festschrift photo, age 67).

On 27 September 2000, Dr. Walter Woelber Dalquest lost his battle with Parkinson's disease. Walt's first wife of 52 years, Peggy, preceded him in death in January 1992. Survivors include his wife of 8 years, Rose; a daughter, Linda Schultz; her husband, Mike; a stepson, Richard Carpenter, and his wife, Marianna; 3 grandchildren; and 2 great grandchildren.

Walter was born 11 September 1917 in Seattle, Washington, to Nils Walter and Florence (Woelber) Dalquest. Both sets of grandparents were emigrants from Sweden. He received his B.S. in 1940 and M.S. in 1941 from the University of Washington and his Ph.D. in 1951

from Louisiana State University under the direction of Dr. George Lowery.

Walt was an intensely private and self-deprecating man who modestly described himself as a "rat-stuffer," as a "bone-digger," and as one who "knew a little about a lot of things but very little about any one thing." Those of us fortunate enough to spend time with him knew better. His breadth of knowledge reflected an academic background that included biology, geology, and biochemistry. He had a teaching repertoire that included human anatomy and physiology, general zoology, comparative vertebrate anatomy, field zoology, limnology, ornithology, herpetology, ichthyology, mammalogy, vertebrate paleontology, wildlife management, and history and literature of the biological sciences. Walt taught each course without notes and always started his classes exactly where he stopped the previous lecture. Every field trip was a lesson in geologic formations and the lives and natural histories of any vertebrate or invertebrate that came into view. His publication record ran the gamut from geology to fishes and mammals, both fossil and extant.

As a young naturalist, Walt was influenced by the field efforts and published works of renowned field biologists such as Vernon Bailey and Ed Taylor. At an early age, Walt started what would become a marvelous professional library that would continue to serve Walt and his students to this day. He seemed to have picked up some of these early naturalists' field ethics, for his personal vertebrate catalog number exceeded 24,000, and >50% of those were mammalian skins—a level of collecting activity rivaled by very few. He strongly believed that the instructor should be in the field with his students. Walt was still active well into his 70s, and even on paleontological digs, he could not sleep until he had 50–75 museum specials baited and set and a few bat nets out working for him. Lunch was something that waited until the skins were pinned out and drying, and any spare time was spent exploring for caves, possible fossil deposits, or gopher mounds.

During his graduate school days at the University of Washington, young graduate teaching assistant Walt became interested in Peggy Burgner, a student of his who was later to accompany him to the Provincial Museum in Victoria, British Columbia, to measure specimens of snowshoe hares for his M.S. thesis under the direction of Dr. Arthur Svihla. Walt and Peggy were married on 8 August 1940, the beginnings of shared adventures in both the field and the lab. Her background as a grammarian was immediately put to work as 1st reader of his manuscripts, for by the time Walt received his 2nd degree from the University of Washington, he had 10 papers to his credit, including the taxonomic description of 3 new gophers and a meadow mouse. It is noteworthy that Walt always composed his manuscripts on the typewriter, many times with the portable typewriter in his lap and always using only his 2 index fingers. The speed at which he could type was unbelievable.

Walt's reputation as an accomplished naturalist and collector caught the attention of Dr. E. Raymond Hall, then of the University of California, Berkeley. After some correspondence and 2 joint papers, Professor Hall convinced the young Dalquest to come to California.

During the course of Walt's earlier tenure at the University of Washington and continuing through his 1941–1945 stay at Berkeley, he and Dr. Victor B. Scheffer of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service collaborated on the mammals of Washington. Walt completed the study when Dr. Scheffer was later assigned to other duties, and his 1948 treatise remains the definitive work on mammals from that state. Walt's long-term friendship with Dr. Scheffer also resulted in a series of joint publications. In his book *Adventures of a Zoologist* (pp. 39–44), he details many of their field trip experiences and described Walt as “a lively companion, brilliant, imaginative, and friendly, with a charming disregard for tradition and rules. Had he been born a generation later, I suppose he would have been called a hippie.” Walt's friends of earlier years can take comfort in the fact that these adjectives accurately described the man until the end.

When Professor Hall moved to the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence in the autumn of 1945, he contacted Walt and told him the KU museum was interested in financing a collecting trip to Veracruz, Mexico. Walt and Peggy also headed for Lawrence that autumn. While there,

he met Professor Edward H. Taylor, a well-known herpetologist with whom Walt had corresponded while he was an undergraduate at the University of Washington. Ed and Walt became good friends. Because Ed had collected in Mexico and stayed in the home of Dyfrig Forbes, contacts were made for Walt and Peggy to do likewise. In February 1946, the paperwork was completed, and they drove to Mexico. The following summer, Peggy left Mexico for her parents' home in Washington because she was pregnant. Linda was born 23 February 1947. Walt was notified of the birth via a telegram. On returning from the field with his assistants, they received the news and celebrated by firing a few rounds into the air! During the rainy season, Walt began writing a personal journal of his jungle experiences as a means of explaining to his daughter Linda what he was doing during the earliest stage of her life. Only after 47 years had elapsed would his wife, Rose, and close friends finally convince him to publish this journal. Walt agreed only after considering that this book (*The Tehuantepec Jungle*, 1996) might have some merit because of its description of a Mexican jungle that has been diminished and altered over the past few decades.

Some experiences in Mexico were rather painful. A nasty fall while exploring caves for bats resulted in his emergency transport to a village with a medical doctor. After being nursed back to health and released from care, a grateful Walt returned to present the physician with a case of rum—only to discover that the doctor was a recovering alcoholic who was practicing medicine in this remote village for the explicit purpose of avoiding the temptation of liquor.

Walt returned to Lawrence assuming that he would compile his studies of the mammals of Veracruz for his Ph.D. dissertation. However, Dr. Hall wanted him to select another dissertation topic. Walt's detailed field notes on his extensive collections were later revised and condensed by Hall, who published the book on Veracruz mammals in 1963 with Walt as 2nd author. Although Hall and Dalquest had their differences, during his later years, Dr. Hall would telephone Walt on an irregular basis to reminisce over their years at KU, and Walt took great pride in the Kansas redbud tree in his backyard that was presented to him by Dr. and Mrs. Hall shortly after his move to Wichita Falls, Texas.

Walt's friendship with Dr. George Lowery,



Walt with his dog, Pero, in front of his parents' home in Seattle, Washington. Pero was an "import" from Veracruz, Mexico.

whom he met at KU while Lowery was working on his Ph.D., led him to accept an invitation to pursue his Ph.D. at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. In the autumn of 1950, he returned to Mexico, this time to collect specimens for his dissertation in the State of San Luis Potosí. Long before the study of bats was fashionable, Walt had accrued a series of publications on these elusive and difficult-to-study mammals. Dr. Lowery provided him with 3 Japanese mist nets, with instructions to try them on bats. The revolutionary application of this new tool was a great success. Walt later submitted a lively account of his pioneering experiences on bat netting in Mexico that so impressed the editor of the 1954 *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science* that he provided the following preface to the published article:

"Those of us who work in various fields of science have methods of work which differ greatly from one another. The editor has found Dr. Dalquest's account of his methods of work as a bat collector, possibly one of the rarest of scientific pursuits, so fascinating that

he wants other readers of the *Transactions* to share his pleasure. We are therefore giving Professor Dalquest's paper the number one position in this issue of the *Transactions*."

In 1952, Walt accepted a position with the Biology Department of Midwestern State University (then Midwestern University) in Wichita Falls, Texas. Suitably impressed with the school and surrounding countryside, he returned to Baton Rouge to fetch his family. Walt and Peggy moved into an apartment while he started construction on their house. He purchased a large lot on the shores of Lake Wichita, which had a 2-room fishing shack. That small building was moved to higher ground, and Walt then demonstrated his adeptness at carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. As funds became available, he gradually added to the house size, and at the age of 76, he added 2 rooms and a double garage to meet the desires of his new wife. While some angles of the house were perhaps not quite square and the walls not plumb, it was built to exceed local building codes, and he would brag that only the direct hit of a tornado could bring the house down.

He was a voracious reader with diverse tastes, although detective mysteries were a favorite. He continually read journals, books of science, history, archaeology, lapidary, and nature. Every spring, Walt planted a large garden that required friends, neighbors, students, and colleagues to take their share of tomatoes, cantaloupe, grapes, blackberries, onions, and other delicacies, and he took only mild exception to the depredations of rabbits, cottonrats, and birds. Walt always had an interest in rocks and minerals, which led to his working in lapidary. He produced countless belt buckles and jewelry items to be given freely as gifts. Hunting and fishing also were favored pastimes. For years, Walt took his boat to the Texas Gulf Coast in pursuit of kingfish, Spanish mackerel, red snapper, ling, and sailfish. Deer and turkey hunts were an annual affair, and he regularly hunted his own properties near Brownwood in central Texas and near Big Bend National Park in Trans-Pecos Texas. Venison was the major meat component in his diet.

As the 1st vertebrate biologist at Midwestern State University, Walt began the long and continuous process of building a museum collection. Opportunity knocked when a local rancher, Ira Green of Electra, brought in some old bones,

including the horn core and a metapodial of an extinct bison. He consulted with an old friend from his KU days—noted paleomammalogist W. Claude Hibbard. He ultimately met another paleontologist, Dr. Alfred S. Romer, who also worked fossil deposits in the area. Walt developed long-lasting personal friendships as well as a professional relationship with these two scientists.

In 1962, Walt's studies of Recent and fossil mammals led Midwestern State University to name him the 1st Hardin Professor. This is an annual award in recognition for excellence in teaching and research, and to date, his publication record remains the most impressive in Midwestern State University's history. Later honors included honorary membership in 1984 from the Texas Society of Mammalogists, the W. Frank Blair Eminent Naturalist Award from Association of Southwestern Naturalists in recognition of his lifetime of excellence in studies of the fauna of the Southwest, and the Schultz-Othmer Medal (only the 2nd ever presented) from the Institute for Tertiary-Quaternary Studies for his long record of contributions to paleontology and paleoecology. Dr. Dalquest's research and collecting efforts while at Midwestern State University resulted in sizable collections of vertebrates, both fossil and extant. The mammal collection alone has >22,000 specimens. The collection received a significant increase in 1963 and 1965, when Walt accompanied Jerry Vinson of Wichita Falls to collect mammals near the Save River in south-central Mozambique. This collection will remain a permanent legacy to Walt Dalquest. He was an active member of numerous scientific organizations and served actively as a reviewer for several journals, including the *Journal of Mammalogy*.

Since 1967, when Midwestern State University started a masters degree program in biology, Dr. Dalquest served as committee chair or thesis director for 41 masters students. Included in this group are many who have gone on to obtain their doctorates in pursuit of careers in the biological sciences, many of these in neo- or paleomammalogy: John T. Baccus, Larry L. Choate, Gerald A. Clyde, Jr., Jim R. Goetze, the late Billy J. Hart, Frank W. Judd, C. William Kilpatrick, Julie R. Kitchens-Maier, Dennis C. Parmley, Walter W. Riddle, Edward L. Roth, Kent S. Smith, and Frederick B. Stangl, Jr.

Walt was a unique individual in many ways.

He did not understand why the administration at Midwestern State University made such an ado over his many accomplishments. Walt enjoyed his research work, and years before he retired, he made the comment that he could not believe he got paid to do what he wanted to do anyway! During his career, he published 7 books and 173 research articles in mammalogy, ornithology, ichthyology, and vertebrate paleontology. He was one of the world's leading scholars in Pleistocene vertebrates, especially fossil horses. Even after Walt's health began to fail, he still enjoyed gardening, trapping, looking for new fossil sites, fishing, hunting, traveling with Rose, reading, and visiting with his former students and close friends about his many adventures. The field of mammalogy lost a dedicated scholar, his former students lost their mentor, and those of us who had the honor of working with him lost our colleague and dear friend.

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