

Obituaries

We were grieved to learn of the deaths of three members of the Society since the 1978 general meeting. They were Dr. S.F. Smerd, Dr. L.J. Gleeson and Dr. E.J. Hartung.

S.F. SMERD

A Tribute spoken at his funeral by J.P. Wild

The full name of the man we have gathered here to honour and pay our last respects to is Dr Stephen Frederick Smerd, universally known to his friends and colleagues as Steve. But the teutonic sound of his formal name reminds us of his European origins as did, for all his exposure to the sunburnt country, his retention of a touch of central Europe in his accent. Steve's native land was Austria and, like the Von Trapp family, he made his get-away as the Nazis moved in. As a young man he found a new home and became a university student in England; and those who knew him well realized that he thenceforth became an anglo-phile — more English than the English in so many of his attitudes and ideals. Not that the English establishment treated him with particular sympathy, for when Britain's sterner war began in 1940, they rounded him up — with great constabulary courtesy, he assured me — among the enemy aliens and carted him off to Canada — for a while at least before deciding to treat him as a loyal subject and set him free. He finished the war in a high security radar research establishment. So he spent almost the entire war surrounded by barbed wire: during the first part, the barbed wire was to stop him getting out; and during the second, to stop other people getting in.

After the war, Steve migrated to Australia and joined the Radiophysics Laboratory of CSIRO. I did the same a year later and I soon got to know Steve very well and became a close friend. I also remember my first job which required a length measurement of such high precision that I needed to consult an expert from the neighbouring NSL. That expert was a charming young lady named Beth Fraser, soon to become Steve's wife.

As the post-war years passed, Steve's professional interests, like mine, centred around the study of the physics of the Sun. He made many original contributions through his researches and acquired a knowledge of the Sun deeper and more comprehensive than any person I know in the world. In his field he became an international figure much in demand at international meetings. He reached the top of his profession and ended his career directing one of the most powerful solar research teams in the world. As Beth and his family will bear witness, he did a great deal of travelling — perhaps sometimes a bit too much for their liking. Very often he and I found ourselves together at distant places all over the world — he was a stalwart and delightful travelling companion; sometimes the two of us became known as a pair, like Hobbs and Sutcliffe, sometimes, I fancy, like Laurel and Hardy.

Another side of Steve was *Steve the family man*: he was always speaking with pride and love about his family, his

beloved wife Beth and his four children; speaking about their problems, their achievements and their aspirations. He complained — but in a boastful sort of way — that his boys Ian, Michael and Timothy were so much bigger than he that, for the purposes of self defence, he needed to retain his adeptness for unarmed combat which he had learned during the war in the Home Guard. And when his daughter, Stephanie, arrived on the scene — a girl after three boys — never did a father gloat and dote so much over an offspring.

No tribute to Steve would be complete without reference to Steve's politics. These I fancy were moulded in early youth and could be described as lying somewhere between old-fashioned liberalism and old-fashioned socialism. The common thread is not so much that they were old-fashioned as that they were directed towards a desire to give support and uplift to the lot of the common man, especially the less privileged.

There is little need for me to say further which way he voted at Federal elections. Indeed, the mere mention of the name of the Liberal Country Party leader of the time in Steve's presence could sometimes unleash his wrath and trap its utterer in a ten minute admonition. Yet there was also one moment in history — in 1974 or 5 — when his wrath descended on the Labor leader: that was when Whitlam tried to dismember the CSIRO.

Like a lot of scientists Steve was not a religious man in the conventional sense. I believe he found such a store of wonder and mystery in the depths of nature and the natural world that he did not find the need for additional stimuli from superstitions and the supernatural. I fancy that to him God and Nature were inextricably inseparable.

Steve will be remembered, not only by his wife and family, but by his countless friends here and all over the world as a man of great humanity and compassion; a man who combined a high order of intellectuality with complete humility; a man who laughed a lot but always laughed at himself before others: a man of great good will who moved towards his selfless objectives with patience, tenacity and, if need be, obstinacy.

L.J. GLEESON

An Address given at the Monash University Religious Centre on 21 February 1979 by K.C. Westfold.

All of us here today, family, friends, colleagues of Leo Gleeson have come that we may celebrate his life among us, a life that has just come to its end. We can be grateful for such opportunities as this, for they allow us to step back from our often excessive business and, as we consider the contributions of one whom we have known and respected, reflect on what we are making of our own lives and our own professions.

Leo Gleeson's association with Monash dates from the first days of the university as a teaching institution, at the beginning of 1961. Shortly after taking up duty as Professor of Mathematics at Monash I was called up by my friend and

colleague of long standing, John Ryan of the Melbourne Mathematics department, recommending a young man of relatively mature years — 30 — as a very promising student who had just completed his B.Sc., majoring in Mathematics. He had come up the hard way but, given the opportunity, would certainly make his mark in the world as a mathematician. And so Leo Gleeson became our first research student in the Monash department of mathematics.

Leo had indeed come up the hard way — in respect of both his academic career and his health. His first steps on the academic ladder were taken when he embarked on an electric wiring course at the Melbourne Technical College, later to become the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. His teachers had evidently quickly noted his singular abilities, for he was soon directed into a Diploma course in Radio Engineering. On completing his diploma he was appointed in 1951 to the staff of the PMG Research Laboratories, working in the field of radio propagation. At the same time he undertook further part-time studies at the RMIT, being awarded one of the Institute's first Fellowship Diplomas in 1957, this time in the field of Communications Engineering. It was during this period that his abilities came to the attention of one of his mathematics lecturers, John Ryan.

Unhappily, in this same year he was struck down with hepatitis, the disease whose residual effects were thereafter to limit him physically, and in the end to terminate his life at the early age of 48. Although invalided out of the PMG's department, he was encouraged by Ryan to begin further part-time studies for his B.Sc. at the University of Melbourne, which he completed in 1960.

In his first years as a research student at Monash, Leo took an active and enthusiastic part in teaching mathematics to our first small cohorts of students. He was not only interested in students *per se*, but consciously saw this activity as an opportunity to ground himself more surely in the mathematical and physical sciences in which he was later to function so effectively. His thesis bears all the marks of that careful grounding together with a developing physical insight. After his Ph.D. he undertook postdoctoral work in the United States, first at Cornell University and later at the University of California at San Diego, to which he later returned for a year of study leave as a visiting research fellow. During his postdoctoral years he quickly gained an international reputation for his work in the field of cosmic-ray transport theory.

In 1968 I persuaded him to return to Monash to work with me as a research fellow. He joined me in my own work on synchrotron radiation while continuing with his distinguished contributions to cosmic-ray physics. During this time he also began some pioneering investigations in the theory of geophysical prospecting by electromagnetic methods, work now being carried on by his students. He was appointed Reader in the University in 1973. Our association continued less formally in 1976 when we both returned to the department of Mathematics.

Up to this time Leo had managed by a strict regimen to contain his physical condition. But now his state of health had become critical, necessitating long periods in hospital and major surgery. Throughout this time he maintained a remarkable output of ideas expressed in his publications and in his correspondence with colleagues around the world, including his research students past and present. His enthusiastic drive and penetrating ideas have their own continuing impetus in the contributions his associates will continue to make.

Leo always seemed to regard his state of health in a manner that was objective but not detached. Its management and treatment was a cooperative enterprise undertaken in partnership with his doctors. I am told that most of the patients who present to the medical profession with a condition like Leo's also display a serious deterioration of cerebral function. Leo was singular in that his brain remained active and inquiring until the end. The physiological and biochemical constraints under which his body was required to operate were to him matters of intense scientific interest. Sometimes he gave the impression that, if he were not actually directing the medical management of his condition, he was a major collaborator with the team of doctors tackling this problem of maintaining his bodily functioning.

On an occasion such as this we become starkly aware of our own mortality — that we are but dust unto dust we shall return. With Leo's passing we indeed feel diminished. But the example of what he was able to accomplish in a situation of chronic adversity that would have reduced a lesser person to a life of inertia can afford us real encouragement to make something of the powers that accompany those marvellous physiological, biochemical and psychic entities that we are, before our bodies, too, return to dust. As this morning we celebrate the life of Leo John Gleeson I trust that something of his spirit will remain with those whom he influenced to the end of their days.