

## **MEMORIAL RESOLUTION**

### **DONALD EDWARD ROBINSON**

**(July 14, 1936 - October 29, 2010)**

At Don Robinson's Celebration of Life, speakers described his various roles as colleague, friend, mentor, husband, scientist, parent, and teacher, but it was this last role that seemed to be the most inclusive. A born teacher. Whether he was explaining chi square to a group of undergraduates in a statistics class or laying out the pros and cons of oval vs. rectangular swimming pools or developing mathematical model of binaural processing for his colleagues or describing the best way to make Texas chili, Don was a teacher in the classroom, in his office, in his laboratory. Indeed, for Don, teaching didn't end at 5:00 p. m., but often continued at Nick's with his graduate students and colleagues. Students recall how they saved, for later study, numerous napkins covered with equations.

Don's work with graduate students was extraordinary. Certainly his students learned about hearing, stimulus control, psychophysical procedures, and modeling, but more importantly they learned about being a scientist, respecting data, even if it didn't agree with your theory, and doing the absolute best job you could. Indeed, as his students report, teaching didn't end with receiving your PhD: Don formed a lasting relationship with his students.

As a scientist, Don made important contributions in two major areas, auditory psychophysics and signal detection theory and its application to decision making. His work on models of how the two ears work together to improve our ability to perceive auditory signals and his work on how to optimally use information to make decisions still influences current research. His work on serial decision processing has important implications in dealing with alarm signals in hospitals, in nuclear power plants, and in air-traffic control centers. His work was supported by such agencies as the Federal Aviation Administration, National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health.

As one of the first persons in the Psychology Department to embrace computer technology, Don became our resident expert. He was the person you went to for advice in setting up lab web pages or in developing course material using the web. He chaired the University's Academic Computing Policy Committee for a number of years. Don was

also the person you frequently went to for advice on research problems. Combining his expertise on signal detection theory and statistics, Don was a magnet for knotty research problems. Numerous graduate students and faculty members, including me, trooped to Don's office with often ill-formed problems. Don would begin by asking you question, finding out what you were really trying to measure, what your assumptions were, and so forth. The solution was a collaborative effort, and it was only in hindsight that you realized who was doing most of the heavy lifting.

Retiring from IU in 2000, Don and his wife Donna returned to his beloved Texas where Don found new interests and one that I could not have predicted, butterflies. Don became a master naturalist and worked at the Kerrville Schreiner Park Butterfly Garden, Kerrville, Texas.

Don referred to himself as a "curmudgeon" as did others but prefaced the word with "loveable." When he was asked what he wanted his new granddaughter to call him, he replied, "Herr Doctor Professor Robinson." He returned from his visit to her, as many grandfathers do, with stories of her cleverness and cuteness, now being called "Grandpop" and no further mention of "Herr Doctor." To further clarify that label "curmudgeon," one of his co-worker at the Kerrville Schreiner Park tells the story of the ongoing debate that she and Don were having about the use of chemical herbicides in the garden—Don on the pro-side, she very much against it. While she was on vacation, Don sent her an email with a photo attached: Don, big grin, sitting on a garden bench in the park holding a can of Round-Up. He could have, but he didn't use it.

"Tell me truth," a standard greeting when you came to Don's office and one he lived by.

This memorial resolution is presented to his family: his wife Donna, his two children, Linda Robinson Barr and Robert L. Robinson and his wife Celeste, and grandchildren Sarah Robinson, Audrey Robinson, and Connor Barr.

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