




In Memorium: Donald J Reish

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For such a humble man, his life had an outsized impact in so many ways. He rarely raised his voice, but he had a hearty laugh. Despite his competitive streak, we never saw him hold a grudge. He was honest, insightful, and treated everyone—regardless of gender, race, nationality, or religion—with respect. In his own words, “I am no different from anyone else—I think of myself as being more important than I actually am. I think that I made important contributions in two areas: teaching and research”. But, without Donald J Reish, the career of everyone who is reading these proceedings would likely be different.

Donald Reish had an outsized impact on his family. He was born in 1924 and was married in 1952 to his life-long love Janice. Together, they had three children and six grandchildren. Don traced his first interests in biology to age 9, when he started a butterfly collection. In 1946, he graduated from the University of Oregon. It was there that he declared his research focus on polychaetes. In 1952, he earned his PhD at the University of Southern California under Olga Hartman. Like most polychaetologists, he struggled finding full-time work after graduation, then found his home at California State University Long Beach in 1958 where he taught for 30 years.

Donald Reish had an outsized impact on science. He is one of the original marine biologists that focused on pollution studies utilizing invertebrates as indicators of human impacts. The benthic biological surveys and toxicity testing using invertebrates that are now commonly used worldwide are, at least in part, because of Donald Reish. Partly to study life histories, and then later for toxicity testing broodstock, Don started laboratory cultures of many polychaetes. The most famous was *Neanthes arenaceodentata*, which he first cultured from specimens collected in 1964 from Los Angeles Harbor while hunting for wood-borers. In his 30+ years working the “worm farm”, Reish supplied more than 80 laboratories/research institutes and sold over 400,000 specimens. *Neanthes* is now a standard method for toxicity testing and is a staple for sediment quality testing in the United States.

Donald Reish had an outsized impact on his students. He was a high school teacher, then later became a teacher of teachers, training junior and senior high school teachers in science education. By his estimation, he taught nearly 3,000 students as a professor at California State University Long Beach (CSULB) from 1958 to 2014. In total, he graduated 57 Master of Science students, the terminal degree at his institution. These academic offspring now work at state and federal agencies, teaching and research universities, local municipalities and industry, and consulting groups across the country. Reish once wrote “I wondered what makes a good teacher. I came to realize that teaching is an art—it is a product of one’s personality, his interest in people, his love of the subject matter”. Every one of his students know this to be true.

Donald Reish also had an outsized impact on the International Polychaete Conference (IPC). He organized the third IPC in 1989 at CSULB. Reish then attended every IPC that followed, helping edit most of the IPC proceedings. Near the conclusion of his career, Reish stated, “What was my impact on science, in biology, in invertebrate zoology, polychaetology? I think that I am perhaps the primary person to scientifically popularize polychaetes.”

If you are like us, then Donald Reish has had an outsized impact on you. To find out more about this humble man, I encourage you to read his memoirs [My Life as a Marine Biologist] or view this video [Tribute to Don Reish] from his many colleagues, which debuted at IPC 13 in Long Beach (2019).



FIGURE 1. (courtesy of Bruno Pernet). A. Don Reish in his worm farm in the 1960s or 70s. B. Don in the early 2000s.

References

- Reish, D.J. (2014). My life as a biologist. [<http://ftp.sccwrp.org/pub/download/PRESENTATIONS/Posters/DonReishAutobiography.pdf>]
- Anonymous (2019). A Tribute to the Career of Donald J. Reish: Teacher...Leader...Friend. [<https://vimeo.com/sccwrp/review/391332156/77a2b88557>]