

In Memoriam: Professor Walter James Harman, PhD (1928–2002)

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Our dear friend and colleague, Dr Walter James Harman, passed away on 1 April 2002, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA, at the age of 74. He was a long time faculty member at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge. Dr Harman is survived by Dorothy Brewster Harman, his wife of 47 years, two daughters – Dea Harman O'Rourke and Nan Harman Brinson, three grandsons – Colin, Andrew, and Bennett, and his mother – Colvis Lovette.

Dr Harman was born on February 25, 1928 in Strong, Union County, Arkansas. He completed primary and secondary education in his hometown, graduating from Strong High School in 1945. He enrolled as an undergraduate student at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in Ruston, receiving his B.S. degree in 1948. He was then accepted into graduate school at The University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, receiving his Master of Arts degree in 1950. In January 1950, Dr Harman became an instructor in the Zoology Department of Louisiana Polytechnic Institute (Louisiana Tech). He then served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1952–1954, primarily as one of the elite Military Police and for a time was assigned with the Secret Service to provide security for President Dwight David Eisenhower.

After his release from military service, Dr Harman returned to Louisiana Tech as an assistant professor of Zoology. In 1955, he enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign under the guidance of Dr Max R. Matteson; during his enrollment there, he was elected as a Scholar and Fellow (Southern Fellowship Fund Foundation) in three successive years (1955–1957). Upon completion of class and research requirements for his doctoral degree, Dr Harman returned to Louisiana Tech in 1958, continuing as an assistant professor of Zoology

while concurrently writing his PhD thesis on the taxonomy and nomenclature of the earthworms occurring in central Illinois; his doctoral degree from the University of Illinois was awarded on 13 February 1960. He continued as an associate professor at Louisiana Tech until 1961, then took a position as an assistant professor at LSU in Baton Rouge; by 1963 he had attained the rank of Associate Professor. In late 1963, he was promoted to full professor and appointed Chairman of the Department of Zoology and Physiology. He served as chairman of that department until 1977, then continued as a professor until his retirement in 1989.

Dr Harman's research focused primarily on the taxonomy, systematics, and ecology of terrestrial and aquatic oligochaetes. The majority of his publications focused on the Naididae and Opisthocystidae of North, Central, and South America, but his research interests also included other annelid groups, nemertean, mollusks, and cycads. Dr Harman was the author or co-author of 44 peer-reviewed publications, book and book chapters, and popular articles; citations for these publications follow this obituary.

Over the course of his career, he amassed an extensive and diverse collection of oligochaetes. In 1984, Dr Harman donated the earthworm collection resulting from his doctoral research to the Illinois Natural History Survey Annelida Collection, Champaign; after retirement, he transferred the remainder of his extensive collection of primarily aquatic oligochaetes to the Division of Worms at the National Museum of Natural History–Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, USA.

Dr Harman was a member of several professional organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Microscopical Society, American Society of Zoologists, Louisiana Academy of Sciences,

the Society of Systematic Zoology, and the Cycad Society. Although he thought of himself to be only a regular member of the Cycad Society, his fellow members maintain that he was *the* founding father of that society. He also served as the first editor of the Cycad Society Newsletter. During the preparation of this obituary, conversations with Garrie Landry and other members of the Cycad Society revealed that Dr Harman's interest in oligochaetes was virtually unknown to his fellow botanists; likewise, few of us who interacted with Dr Harman in the world of oligochaetology knew of his botanical interests. The Cycad Society has established the Walter Harman Cycad Research Fund in his honor.

Dr Harman served as editor for the Proceedings of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences (1959–1963), as secretary of the Division of Invertebrate Zoology of the American Society of Zoologists, and as Program Officer (1977) and Vice President (1976–1978) for the American Microscopical Society. He served as a science consultant to the Rijksmuseum (Leyden, The Netherlands) and the Natural Museum of Natural History – Smithsonian Institution, (Washington, DC), and as a member of the Board of Directors for the Greater Baton Rouge Zoo (Baton Rouge, Louisiana).

Dr Harman was a member of our 'Founding Class' of participants at the First International Symposia on Aquatic Oligochaete Biology, hosted by Ralph Brinkhurst and convened at the Institute of Ocean Sciences in Sydney, BC, Canada, in 1979. He also participated in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd North American Aquatic Oligochaete Symposia convened in a log cabin near Echo Lake and Mount Evans in Colorado, USA, during the early and mid-1980s. Dr Harman served as our host for the 4th International Symposium on Aquatic Oligochaete Biology in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 14–18 March 1988. Soon after this meeting, on April 8th, Dr Harman suffered a massive stroke that restricted his ability to walk but not his ability to think and communicate effectively – both scientifically, and from his heart.

Although restricted to a wheelchair, Dr Harman's character, inner strength, and his desire as a scientist allowed him to attend and participate in the 5th North American Oligochaete Symposium

at the University of Wyoming Biological Station at Jackson Lake, Wyoming, USA, in 1990. At that meeting, Dr Harman talked compassionately about the love he had for science, for the beauty of nature, and for the opportunities he had experienced over the years as an oligochaetologist. He also shared with us that he was [at that time] experiencing the biggest challenge, and disappointment, in his life – 'hosting' intense and lucid mental activity in a failing body; sadly, this was perhaps the last time most of his oligochaete colleagues would be with him.

Dr Harman had a strong and passionate love for teaching, a perpetual calmness in conversation, a dislike for pretension, an occasional desire for a martini so dry that the word vermouth, a two-syllable word, was never spoken out loud in the presence of gin, and a subtle yet humorous wit that was often as dry as his martinis. His gentle charm, love for books and plants, and the worship of God through the uniqueness, diversity, and beauty of the zoological and botanical world in which we live was apparent in each of our interactions with him. First and foremost, however, Dr Harman's colleagues, students, friends, and family will remember him as a courteous southern gentleman (Fig. 1).

During each of the preceding international symposia on aquatic oligochaete biology, and in



Figure 1. Dr Walter J. Harman, at his microscope in the Life Sciences building at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, ca. 1975; photo courtesy of Dorothy Harman.

many of the published symposia proceedings, we have honored the memory of deceased colleagues and friends – those who have participated in one or more of these symposia, and those who have provided significant influence on the directions of our own scientific endeavors. These include Drs H. Randy Baker, Sergej Hrabe, Clarence J. Goodnight, Andreina Di Chiara, Gilberto Righi, and Perry C. Holt. Therefore, as a participant in each of the nine international aquatic oligochaete symposia, and on behalf of the organizing committee of this present symposium and our fellow oligochaetologists, worldwide, who have known Dr Harman and benefited from both his scientific contributions and his sincere kindness, we hereby dedicate this 9th International Symposium on Aquatic Oligochaete Biology to the memory of Dr Walter J. Harman.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dorothy Harman, for her friendship for so many years, and for her trust in me to write this dedication for the most important man in, and love of, her life. I extend my appreciation to Dr Earl H. Weidner, a retired professor and former colleague of Dr Harman at LSU, for sharing memories of their friendship and working relationship with me. I also thank Garrie P. Landry, a professor at the University of Louisiana – Lafayette, and perennial Cycad Society member and friend of Dr Harman; some of the information presented above was paraphrased with permission from Landry (2002). Dr Michael S. Loden, a former graduate student of and research collaborator with Dr Harman while at LSU, kindly reviewed and contributed to this memorial. Finally, I thank Joel Dexter, photographer at the Illinois State Geological Survey, Champaign, for his assistance with photographs used in this dedication as presented at the symposium in Wagenin-gen, The Netherlands, 6 October 2003.

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