

IN MEMORIAM: DON BAER, 1931-2002

Don Baer was my teacher.

He was sometimes a father figure.

I like to think he was something of a friend.

But above all, I regard Don as the sort of person everyone should know at least once. I am glad I knew Don.

Don's sudden death, a few days before his retirement and a future filled with plans, left us shocked and bereaved. I would like to believe that Don was too vital to have spent much time on matters of dying. I would also like to believe that it is perhaps best that persons of such vitality go quickly, avoiding the encumbrance of pain and reduced agility. But it is for members of the behavioral community to "rationalize," to believe that there is something good in the awful. I believe that Don's sudden loss will continue to send out shock waves for a long, long while.

Don, eclectic in his knowledge, no doubt knew Goethe's story of a scholar possessed of all earthly knowledge, but still lacking for one thing: a moment of sublime and perfect beauty. He found this moment in perfect service to another human being. Don perhaps had the most sweeping and impressive knowledge of all that constitutes behavior analysis of anyone at the time of his death, but unlike the scholar that preceded him, Don must have known many, many moments of such perfect beauty.

Don's books and articles will live as long as there are those who find it imperative that there must be, in Don's own simple but surpassing words, "the application of behavioral principles to problems of social importance." But for those of us who were touched by Don, he lives until the last one of us dies.

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