William Glenn Sly FREE

Special Collection: Print Obituaries

Bernard D. Santarsiero

Physics Today **56** (5), 80 (2003);
https://doi.org/10.1063/1.1583547

A very serious individual, Lengyel nevertheless possessed a keen sense of humor. I am certain that, in my presence, he never used a pun and very rarely used a cliché. He was a strict taskmaster, intolerant of dereliction or malfeasance, yet was compassionate toward those in need and tolerant of new views and values. His reputation as a no-nonsense administrator earned him the faculty's intense respect.

I once asked him which he enjoyed more—research, teaching, learning new areas of physics, practical applications, or administration. He answered simply, "Yes." Those who knew him only in the professional sphere thought of him as a scholar, teacher, and administrator extraordinaire. Those who were closer to him were treated to a spirit who pursued life in all of its beauty. He spoke four languages fluently and enjoyed gardening. He was very busy, but made time to swim, ski, camp, hike, and travel (he even went on a burro trip) with his children and his wife. He was a loving father and husband. My own remembrance of Bela is encapsulated in the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

Barney Bales
California State University, Northridge

William Glenn Sly

William Glenn Sly, professor emeritus of chemistry at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California, died of a stroke on 9 September 2002 at his home in Valley Center, California.

Bill was born on 15 June 1922 in Arcata, California. He attended San Diego State University, where he received his BS in chemistry in 1951. He pursued his doctoral research at Caltech. There, he worked closely with his thesis adviser, Holmes Sturdivant, and with Dick Marsh, Verner Schomaker, and others on x-ray diffraction. Bill's work on a large number of structures was timely, interesting, and difficult, although he did not publish a great deal about those structures. His thesis focused on the structures of β-carotenes and principally on the three-dimensional structure determination of 15,15′-dehydro-β-carotene, at the time a formidable and very interesting molecule due to its long *trans* chain of alternating single and double bonds. He then reported on a redetermination of the structure of $KBrF_4$ and "marshed" an earlier report of the structure. He also determined the structure of dicobalt hexacarbonyl diphenylacetylene, one of the first organometallic compounds with a metal–metal bond to be investigated using x-ray diffraction. Bill earned his PhD in chemistry in 1955.

William Glenn Sly

Following graduation, Bill worked with David Shoemaker at MIT on programming the then new IBM 704 and made improvements on the 3D Fourier and Patterson map calculations that were based on Verner Schomaker's "M-card" system at Caltech (which was on the IBM 402 tabulator and sorter). During this period, Bill focused on two very interesting structures: cyclooctatetraenecarboxylic acid (from Arthur Cope's lab at MIT) and the R-phase of the ternary compound Mo-Co-Cr. He investigated the acid, which has alternating single and double bonds, to ascertain the molecule's shape—either tub or crown—and the details of its bonding. The ternary compound in the R-phase is a complicated structure; Bill explored the relationship of its structure with those in the σ, δ, and P-phases, a feat that was incredibly difficult at the time.

In 1958, Bill joined the faculty of Harvey Mudd College and pursued his teaching and research interests in physical chemistry. His students nicknamed him "Wild Bill" and "The Snowman" because of the amount of information he presented in his courses: He set and maintained the college record of filling 17 boards during a 50-minute physical chemistry lecture and often didn't use any notes. Although formidable in his lecturing style, Bill was completely approachable one-on-one. He possessed a wide range of diverse skills—glassblower, instrument maker, and electronics whiz—that were invaluable in designing laboratory experiments; undoubtedly those were skills acquired from his early days working for Sturdivant at Caltech. Many of the lab experiments that he designed at the college more than 30 years ago are still in use.

Bill enjoyed crystallography, and intermittently followed the advances in the field. He took a sabbatical with Joe Kraut's group at the University of California, San Diego, in the late 1970s, and later worked with me at Caltech on the structure of an organometallic photolysis product. After a seminar I gave at Harvey Mudd College on microcrystallization and advances in structural genomics, he continued to ask a number of interesting and probing questions over lunch. Bill retired in 1992; at the time, his tenure of 34 years was the second longest in college history. He continued to teach laboratory courses part-time.

In addition to his rigor and love of science, Bill was an avid sportsman. He enjoyed tennis, softball, fishing, camping, and skiing. Legend has it that he once fielded first base in a softball game at Caltech with a full, hard leg cast (his leg broken from a skiing accident); fortunately, when he came to bat, the other team let him use a pinch runner.

Another story concerns the research proposals Caltech students often prepared and defended after presenting their dissertations to the faculty. Not surprisingly, one of Bill's proposals was a detailed plan on how to improve the Caltech chemistry softball team. At Harvey Mudd College, he was critically important in developing and nurturing the athletics program and was well known throughout Southern California for his participation in the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. He also designed and installed the first sound system in the college's Ducey Gym. Bill was a dedicated Los Angeles Dodgers fan; it was not unusual to find him working in the lab or his office with a ballgame on the radio in the background.

An early letter of recommendation received by the chemistry faculty at Harvey Mudd College stated that Bill was a "diamond in the rough." He was, indeed, multifaceted, brilliant, sharp, tough, and without polish. His students, colleagues, friends, and family miss his friendship, intellect, energy, and support.

Bernard D. Santarsiero
University of Illinois at Chicago ■