

EDWARD LEETE

Edward Leete was born on April 18, 1928 in Leeds, England. He received a B.Sc. in 1948 in color chemistry with 1st class honors from the University of Leeds. He received a Ph.D. in 1950, also from the University of Leeds, with William Bradley in the organic chemistry of colors and dyestuffs. Ed then received a two-year Goldsmiths Company Traveling Fellowship, which he spent with Leo Marion, a well-known French-Canadian alkaloid chemist, at the National Research Council in Ottawa. He continued with Leo Marion for two more years, until 1954, as a National Research Council of Canada Postdoctorate Fellow.

His work was on alkaloids, which are complex nitrogen-containing compounds produced by plants, partly as a defense mechanism. This work also led to important early studies on the chemistry of indole; Ed's paper with Leo Marion in 1953 on the hydrogenolysis of 3-hydroxymethylindole with lithium aluminum hydride has been widely quoted. Work on alkaloids became Ed's career choice, and he followed a very consistent theme: answering the question - How do plants take the materials available to them, usually amino acids, and put them together in such complex and variable structures as the alkaloids are? This, "the biogenesis of alkaloids," he pursued with all the means available to him, including following the pathways by tracer analysis, both radioactive and non-radioactive, more recently combined with nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy.

In 1954, Ed married Marie and began his academic career as an instructor and later assistant professor at UCLA, the University of California at Los Angeles. In 1958 we were fortunate at Minnesota to hire Ed as a young and promising natural products chemist. He fulfilled that promise. He rose rapidly through the academic ranks, from assistant professor to associate professor in 1960 and full professor in 1963. He had 225 scientific publications, either published or currently in press. He has received a number of academic honors, including an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Fellowship in 1962, given to promising young scientists under age 35, a Guggenheim Fellowship at Oxford in 1965, a D.Sc. degree from the University of Leeds in 1965, the Minnesota Award in 1990, which is the highest award, given every three years, by the Minnesota section of the American Chemical Society, and the first Phytochemistry Prize and Medal, which was awarded to him in 1990.

Even though he had numerous graduate, postdoctoral and undergraduate research students working with him, Ed continued to work in the laboratory

himself because he loved it. If he hadn't been a chemist, I think he would have been an actor, and he combined the best of both in his teaching. Ed liked to give demonstrations of experiments to illustrate his lectures. Each year the organic chemistry faculty hosted a banquet, the "490 Banquet," for the graduate students. It became a tradition, though not necessarily wanted by the faculty, who came equipped with fire extinguishers, for Ed to demonstrate the technique of blowing fire, at which he was adept. The year we had our 490 Banquet at the old Edgewater in northeast Minneapolis on the banks of the Mississippi River, I can well remember the expression on the face of the manager as he stood in the back of the room and watched Ed's fire-blowing demonstration. The ceiling was quite low, and it was a closer call than usual. We weren't invited back the next year, though what a graduate student did in the fountain may have had as much to do with that as Ed's demonstration. Ed was a popular lecturer and his classes were often quite large, though frequently scheduled at 8 o'clock in the morning by his own choice so he could have the rest of the day to work in the lab. Ed received the College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Teaching Award in 1976.

Ed loved to travel to scientific meetings in far away places and to take his wife Sheila and their children with them. I'm sure, as they recall them, they'll have many happy memories of these trips. Ever an optimist, as recently as two weeks ago, Ed was talking enthusiastically about making a trip to Germany for a meeting this summer.

My scientific contact with the Leete family extends to the older children. Allison studied in my father's former department, of Zoology, at the University of Wisconsin. Peter was a student in my organic chemistry class at Minnesota. While we are not permitted to divulge grades without the permission of the recipient, I am sure that Peter's grade made his father proud.

As a juvenile diabetic, Ed probably compensated by being a physical fitness buff. He was an accomplished runner and ran in seven marathons, including the Twin Cities. Many of you have seen him running or jogging along the East River Road with his backpack.

Ed had the curiosity and naiveté of an outstanding scientist and artist, and he was both, where every observation and discovery is a new delight. He had a *joie de vivre* which was contagious. He was spunky and courageous to the end, which came on February 8, 1992, at the age of 63.

Ed loved to write. He wrote excellent letters to his research group at Christmas time and on other occasions, which I was privileged to share. When he was hospitalized after the Halloween blizzard of 1991, he closed his letter with the following statement:

To the Leete Research Group (November 12, 1992):

"... I look forward to being out in the world again and doing my thing, which is: (1) To be a good father and encourage all my children; (2) To let the world know what I have done with my life to this point and what I think about almost anything; (3) Make observations which never have been made before and tell about them; (4) Get back in a better state of health and do things which I enjoy -- run, ski, and do chemistry -- ..."

The world of science and humankind is the better for Ed having been with us. We shall cherish his memory.

Wayland E. Noland
(presented as a eulogy at the memorial
service at the Church of St. Frances
Cabrini, February 10, 1992)