

In Memory: Donald Eugene Stone

Former Executive Director, OTS

1930-2011

The OTS community lost a beloved member of our extended family with the passing of Don Stone on March 4, 2011. Don began his relationship with OTS in 1965 by participating in the Advanced Biology on Tropical Monocots course. At this time, he was a junior faculty member at Duke University and his experience with the OTS course convinced him that Duke should be part of the small consortium. He became the Duke Representative to OTS in 1968 and was elected to the OTS Executive Committee in 1969. The financial crisis of early 1976 was instrumental to Don becoming the Executive Director in April and bringing the North American Office to Duke University in June of that year. Don's persuasive abilities with Duke and NSF officials, his grant writing skills, his ethical nature, his willingness to work hard for something he believed in, and his penchant for straightening out complex problems resulted in the eventual financial solvency of the organization. In fact, Don's Research Initiation and Support (RIAS) grant from NSF, the proposal for which he wrote while on the Executive Committee in December of 1975, and his La Selva Maintenance Grant, which he wrote at the height of the crisis in April 1976, gave OTS the working margin to operate and are credited with the very survival of the organization. He remained the Executive Director of OTS for twenty years and, with his wife Beverly at his side handling the organization's finances, oversaw a tremendous growth in the organization, especially at La Selva which tripled its land holdings to 1,536 hectares, saw significant infrastructure improvements, including NSF-funded laboratories and the NSF-funded foot-bridge across the Puerto Viejo, and major NSF-funded collaborative research projects, which provided the global scientific community with new insight into ecological processes in tropical forests. Significantly, in the early-1980s, under Don Stone and Peter Raven (Chair of the OTS Board), the world conservation community came together to purchase the 47,000 hectares of forest that extended down the slope of Barva Volcano to La Selva 35 miles away. Known as the Zona Protectora, this acquisition to the Braulio Carrillo National Park ensured La Selva's viability as major a research station and more importantly protected thousands of species migrating up and down the forested slope. For that effort and in recognition of the organization's leadership in tropical biology, in 1985 OTS was the first organization to receive the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement. Don's work with the education program also resulted in significant enhancements; most impressive was his relationship with Bill Robertson and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which provided financial stability for OTS' graduate courses for nearly three decades, expanded OTS' courses into Peru and Brazil, and lead to the creation of the undergraduate program shortly after his retirement through his successor Gary Hartshorn. In the late 1980s Don's work with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation resulted in OTS' first courses for U.S. legislative leaders and an endowment that continues this program to this day. In the early 1990s, Don convinced the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to fund OTS in ground-breaking studies on the use of native trees in plantation forestry and reforestation. In 1992 Don established the OTS Board of Visitors to provide guidance to the Board of Directors and CEO on matters outside of biology and in 1995, after the devastating fire at Las Cruces, he oversaw the restoration of that field station and botanical garden to new level of facilities and infrastructure. Don retired from OTS in 1996 and shortly thereafter became the Chair of the Botany Department at Duke University. After he retired from Duke, Don was elected onto the OTS Board of Visitors in 2000 and, later,

was asked in late-2003 to serve as the Interim CEO during the search for the current President and CEO, Elizabeth Losos. Don served in a voluntary capacity during this period and then retired for good in early-2005 to work on his research. Don's interests centered on the systematic and evolution of temperate and tropical plants using biochemistry, cytotaxonomy, comparative anatomy and comparative morphology in the walnut family (Juglandaceae) and pollen development in the ginger family (Zingiberales). In addition to many other publications, he contributed Juglandaceae to the floras of Mesoamerica, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and China as well as Juglans and Carya to the Flora of North America. Don is survived by his wife of 58 years, Beverly, his three daughters: Terry Anne Stone (Tom Eller) of Durham, Janne Stone Allen (Doug Allen) of Las Vegas, NV, and Diane Stone Langdon (Bert Langdon) of Houston, TX, grandchildren Robert, Lauren and Courtney Langdon, brother-in-law Stewart Larson and Caryl, and nieces Amy Larson and Debbie Larson Anderson.

The following comments were taken from Care Pages and emails sent to OTS:

Don was simply the Grand Poobah of OTS for most of its history. How he accomplished so much for so many will always be a major mystery. (We do know he couldn't have done all of it without Bev's own extraordinary commitment). Don's dedication to every aspect of OTS' research, education, programs, field station management, financial health and networking with funders and board members was awe-inspiring. He was a big-picture guy who somehow connected all the details, too. Staff members know he insisted on packing equipment crates! And for every story of faithful mentoring over time, there are dozens more. I will personally never forget his confidence in me, thoughtful guidance and support for Las Cruces. We worked hard, and then he would ask us to work harder--and we did it with glee because we would do anything for him! The last time I saw Don at my finca near Las Cruces a couple of years ago, he asked if Luis Diego's Tiodendron trees were still thriving at Finca Cantaros. He was delighted by the confirmation, which he passed on to Luis on what I think was their last field trip together. Don's smile as he hugged me to say good-bye will shine in my memory. What an original, noble human being.

Gail Hewson Hull - Former Associate Director, Las Cruces

Another legend has passed on. I am very sad. I remember so clearly when I got to know him. I was a very young NSF Staff Officer and I was sent down to Costa Rica to pay a site visit to OTS on behalf of the program officer who was instrumental in clearing the path for NSF funding for OTS. I believe that OTS was the very first (and may have remained the only) field station outside the U.S. getting funding from that agency. A very large part of it was due to the relationship. He devoted himself tirelessly over the decades that followed to support the infrastructure of OTS. I would consider him the Godfather of that organization. Although we had not communicated in years, I am truly sorry he has passed.

S. H. Sohmer - President and Director, Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Don combined lots of qualities that are often mutually exclusive: he was a fine naturalist, a good scientist, an efficient administrator, and a generous and thoroughly nice person. I don't think I ever asked him for anything - a data point, an identification of a plant, or help with an administrative problem - that wasn't

immediately forthcoming, and without a hint of reproach for my taking up his time. A great loss to all of us who knew him, the community is much the poorer.

Hugh Fraser Rowell - Emeritus Professor

We have all lost -Bev, the Stone family, OTS, Duke, Costa Rica, Don's friends- a great man, pioneer in tropical biology, research and education, particularly at La Selva, Las Cruces and Palo Verde. We will miss Don as an inspiring leader but most of all as the gentleman and loyal friend he was, enthusiastically walking Monteverde for hours collecting plants, or our Pacific coast searching for walnut fossils with Luis Diego Gomez and his grandson Robert Langdon. We met Don when our son Carlos Silva was a freshman at Duke in 1978. Walking thru the campus, he saw an OTS poster with a map of Costa Rica. He went in and met a friendly gentleman -none other than Exec Director Dr Stone who told him all about OTS & Costa Rica since 1964. Don's only mistake was, after learning that Carlos played tennis, to invite him to play not knowing he had been MVP in high school. Don told me later: "I didn't think a CR kid would be good at tennis, I should have known better...". As OTS BoV chair I had a close relationship with Don, but couldn't accept being chair while he was just a BoV member -he had been Exec Dir for 20 years- so I proposed a change in by-laws in order to have two co-chairs-Don and I. But soon we needed to ask Don to return as ExD, which he accepted on condition it be pro-bono, without salary I teased him that after being his boss as BoV chair, now he had become my boss. We are very pleased that the suspension bridge at La Selva -a small Golden Gate-bears Don's name: THE STONE BRIDGE. When he would come to Costa Rica in March we had to watch Duke basketball. Once with his pal Dick White they came chez nous to watch the NCAA final. To our horror the broadcast was blacked out during the first half while Duke was being beaten badly. Had to find some consolation with a few gin tonics. Once the problem was fixed we watched Duke come from behind and win it all. More gin tonics, this time to celebrate! During Don's visits to San José we made it a point to have dinner at Jurgen's with Margaret. Once went to beautiful Villa Caletas joined by the Whites and greatly enjoyed it. Now going by these places cannot resign ourselves that we will not be seeing Don again, yet try to overcome our sadness by remembering the friendship we shared and the good times we had together.

Our heartfelt condolence to Bev -we love her-, to all the Stone family and to his friends and travel pals Dick and Norma.

Former Costa Rican Ambassador to the U.S., Rodolfo Silva and his wife Margaret

I am surprised by the sad news. I really appreciated Don; he was in my committee and my professor. He always was full of energy and I will remember him, smiling and young. I saw him few times in meetings, some of them when he visited Panama, home country. I will never forget his letter, in 1978, when I sent specimens of *Oreommunea*, a Juglandaceae, plant family he devoted part of his life to study. He was excited. Please my sincere condolences to all Don's family. I will always remember him.

Mireya D. Correa A. - University of Panama

It was with great sadness that I read about Don's passing. Please accept our condolences. Don was a shining light during our tenure at OTS. He was my most important mentor, teaching me more than one trick about writing NSF grants, dealing with ornery researchers, and figuring out how to keep jungle trails and fancy analytical equipment maintained. His visits to La Selva were highlights in our engagement with OTS. His charm and wit and no nonsense approach to supporting research and education were a welcome change from some of the characters we had to deal with in our jobs. We were fortunate to be present at the dedication of the Stone Bridge and the small monument to this monumental man in OTS history. With the current leadership and support, I am sure that OTS will continue to grow and prosper in the years to come. That, perhaps, would be the best way to honor Don's memory.

Bruce Young and Cynthia Echeve

I send my sincere condolences at this difficult time for you. I have a deep appreciation for Don's many contributions and many warm memories of my interaction with him. He and Jay Savage pulled OTS back from the brink of the abyss when it was teetering on the brink of financial oblivion. His (and your) administrative role got OTS not just back on track, but moving ahead with vigor and vision. The NSF station grants made La Selva a paramount tropical research station, and the Stone bridge made it more easily accessible. The enormous number of OTS-related scientific papers published, students taught and researchers trained in tropical ecology stand as Don's greatest monument.

Tom Yuill - Prof. Emeritus, U of Wisconsin

My heart felt condolences to you and your family on the loss of Don. He always stood tall as beacon for those concerned with tropical biology. His vision, passion and inspiration for the tropics will live in the hearts of the many generation of students, researchers and others he touched. A gentleman and a giant. He will be sorely missed.

Ross Simons - Simons and Associates

Our condolences to Don's Family. I never got to know Don personally but OTS has been a friend to Tuskegee University and our students through study abroad. This means that as Executive Director for OTS, Don touched our lives also. Peace and blessings to the family.

Eloise Carter - Director, International Programs, Tuskegee University

As a Costa Rican that loves nature, visiting La Selva and meeting Don Stone during my teenage years, was pivotal to choosing my career. I ended up going to graduate school at Duke, and working at The World Bank for eight years. I eventually returned to my beloved country, where I continued working in the field. I remember Don's positive and accessible attitude, especially toward young Costarricans. Thank you so much for all you did for my country and my children's country. Blessings and Peace to the family.

Olga Marta Corrales

We are so pleased to have had the chance to meet Don and walk among the trees with him. His delight and joy in being a part of nature brought us understanding and joy. Even though the jungles are full of life, they won't be the same without Don. Our deepest condolences to Don's family.

Pat Sullivan and Susan Erickson

Impossible to believe that Don has passed on. I worked with Don for 2 dozen yrs and had the highest regard for him as a scientist, biologist, botanist, as the visionary father nurturing the growth of OTS from infancy and through several crises, a generous thoughtful mentor to us young coordinators of the 1970s, a considerate effective leader/ administrator, and a most trusted and dear friend

He made the Annual OTS meetings a learning experience for us new Directors/Delegates. Books of memories (well I guess we actually have them in all those amazing Board books with the cartoons!)

Bev: you also deserve HUGE hugs and Carya leaves full of thanks for all the years you put into OTS and all those OTS Board books and cartoons you put together. Without doubt you were Don's most trusted right-hand. The Don & Bev team.

Deepest hugs of appreciation and with profound respect.

Douglas E. Gill - Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland

Lynne and I are deeply saddened by the loss of Don and express our most sincere condolences to you and your family. Don was truly Mr. OTS, giving so unstintingly over many decades. Some of my earliest memories of Don were during the early- and mid-70s when he refused to let OTS go under, almost single-handedly saving what he believed was a worthy institution. He was unique in that he sought out and listened to young grad students and post-docs about how to improve OTS. During my 7+ years as head of OTS, Don was of great help and wise counsel. Even after leaving Durham, I always enjoyed visiting with Don. He leaves an extraordinary and unmatched legacy.

Gary & Lynne Hartshorn

Please accept our sincere condolences on Don's passing. Although I saw him only off-and-on since leaving Duke in 1968, I always remember Don as the young, smiling, twinkly-eyed enthusiast, leading the Duke-Harvard Botanical Expedition mentioned by Jimmy. I'm sure that keeping us three grad students in line (more or less), finding his plants, and making the whole enterprise work from day to day was more taxing than he ever let on. In the end, I have only positive memories of the whole time with him.

Marshall Crosby, Missouri Botanical Garden

My deepest condolences to (Bev) and (the Stone) family. I felt that part of me had passed away when I received an email yesterday from Marshall Crosby telling me about Don's passing. Don was one of the nicest persons I have known in my life. As you probably recall Don & I first met when I was a graduate student at Harvard and we took an OTS course together in the summer of 1965. Our 1966 trip together from Duke to Costa Rica was without doubt one of the most memorable events of my life. I still have very fond memories of staying with you in your lovely home at the beginning and end of our "Joint Duke-Harvard Expedition to Central America to Collect Juglandaceae and Annonaceae." I have always thought that if I had to spend years on a deserted island with just one other human being, my first choice for my sole companion on that island would have been Don Stone. I still can't fully accept that he is no longer with us, but I know that he will live in the lives of the many, many people whose path he crossed.

James ("Jimmy") Walker, University of Massachusetts Amherst

OTS extends our deepest condolences to his family for their tremendous loss. Don's spirit and leadership will be sorely missed by all. In some way, both large and small, his actions have reached every OTS student, researcher, and faculty member. We are all forever grateful for his involvement.

Memorial donations can be made to the Organization for Tropical Studies. Don's family and friends have established the Donald E. Stone Memorial Endowment Fund to provide student scholarships in honor of Don and his work with OTS over the last 5 decades. Through this fund, OTS students will continue to be impacted by Don.

About this fund:

A group of individuals, led by Lucinda McDade, Jim Beach, Julie Denslow and Bette Loiselle, have taken the lead in reaching out to the community to request support of this fund to honor Don's legacy. Those who knew Don know that he is smiling at the thought that his last gesture for OTS would support future generations. We are pleased to announce that all gifts made to this fund before June 30, 2011 will be matched by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.