

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WILLIAM A. BONNER

(1919-2007)

William Bonner died on October 1, 2007, at the age of 87 in Sunnyvale, California while recuperating from heart failure. He had a long and productive career as a teacher and scholar at Stanford. Bonner was born in Chicago in 1919, received a B.S. from Harvard University in 1941 and a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Northwestern University in 1944, with Charles D. Hurd. He was briefly an instructor at Northwestern, came to Stanford as an instructor in 1946, became an Assistant Professor in 1947, and rose rapidly to Professor of Chemistry. He became Emeritus in 1983.

Bonner was a chemist who studied organic reactions and their mechanisms. From his earliest work he had an interest in chirality, the asymmetry of handedness of molecules, and the influence of molecular shape on reactivity. He was among the first to use radioactive labels to study the course and details of chemical reactions. He worked on molecules of biological and practical interest, and produced an extensive body of research work, with more than two hundred published papers. His work was recognized, in part, by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship that he received in 1952. Relatively late in his career, Bonner, collaborating with Edward Rubenstein, developed a hypothesis about the extraterrestrial origin of chiral molecules, including those in earth's living systems. He became an important contributor to the ongoing attempts to explain this important phenomenon. His efforts, both experimental and theoretical, have remained a significant contribution in this scientific area. Bonner was an extraordinary experimentalist, and even late in his life could be found in the laboratory, doing experiments with a level of skill that few graduate students, and almost no faculty, could approach.

Bonner was a mainstay in the teaching in chemistry at Stanford. For many years he taught the large undergraduate organic chemistry course. He was, in addition, the author of a well received undergraduate textbook. His command of the field and his enthusiasm were evident in the classroom and to his students.

Bonner was a special colleague. One of the Stanford people who preceded the major changes that occurred here in the early 1960's, he helped facilitate the growth and changes in the Chemistry Department that ultimately made it one of the finest in the world. He was a good friend to the new people that arrived, both senior and junior faculty, and was always available for help and advise.

Bonner's outside interests included many outdoor activities – hiking, skiing, scuba diving, and motorcycle riding. He was a serious painter in oils and acrylics, producing a substantial body of interesting work.

Bonner is survived by his second wife, Norma, as well his first wife, Cyrena Nelson, and four children: R. Nelson Bonner, Dwarka Bonner, Jay Bonner, and Terra Miller, as well as two stepdaughters, Constance Mosley and Candace Lubin.

Committee:
Richard (Dick) Zare, Chair
John Brauman
Edward Rubenstein