

Walter Theodore Federer

August 23, 1915 — April 14, 2008

Walter Theodore Federer, or “Walt” as he was universally known, was born on August 23, 1915 in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where his parents were homesteaders. He received his B.S. degree in Agronomy from Colorado State University in 1939 and his M.S. degree in Plant Breeding in 1941 from Kansas State University. In 1948, he earned his Ph.D. degree in Mathematical Statistics from Iowa State University and accepted a position as Professor of Biological Statistics in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at Cornell University, where he remained for 60 years. Walt became the first faculty member and Chair of the Biometrics Unit in the Department of Plant Breeding. In 1978, he was awarded the Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor of Statistics Chair, which he held until his retirement in 1986. Walt remained active as an Emeritus Professor for 22 more years, teaching, advising, mentoring, and inspiring his junior colleagues.

Professor Federer was Secretary and Program Coordinator for the Eastern North American Region (ENAR) of the International Biometric Society from 1950-53, President-Elect of ENAR in 1959, and President in 1960. He served as Chairman and Executive Secretary of the Committee of Presidents of Statistical Societies (1965-72), Book Reviews Editor (1964-72), and Associate Editor for *Biometrics* (1972-76), Associate Editor for *Communications in Statistics* (1972-94), and Associate Editor for the *Journal of Statistical Planning and Inference* (1976-90). He was a member of numerous national, international, university, and government panels and boards, and he was a consultant for several international agricultural research stations.

Professor Federer was a Fellow of the American Statistical Association (1958), American Association for the Advancement of Science (1962), Royal Statistical Society (1964), and Institute of Mathematical Statistics (1967), and he was elected a Member of the International Statistical Institute (1974). He was awarded the Honor Alumnus Achievement Award (1972) and Honored Alumnus Award (2001) by Colorado State University, and the Distinguished Service in Agriculture Award (1988) by Kansas State University.

Walt was a major intellectual figure in the field of statistics. He gave us somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 published articles, an uncountable number of Biometrics Unit technical reports, and nine superb books, including his pioneering 1955 *Design of Experiments*, which became a major scholarly contribution and served as a day-to-day tool of statistical practice for innumerable researchers in agriculture and other fields. Walt’s pearls of practical

wisdom on design of experiments have become an integral part of statistical theory and practice throughout the world. His work will have continuing impact in the fields of statistics and agriculture.

Walt loved to collaborate with other researchers, getting them interested in projects he was working on and getting involved in projects that others brought to him. He took enormous pleasure in pushing back the boundaries of the unknown, and his excitement was multiplied by sharing it with collaborators. He was always ready to invite others to share his intellectual voyages of discovery, and he was always generous in giving credit to others for their role in the process.

Walt traveled the world to fulfill a calling to improve the lives of others, sometimes at great personal discomfort—doing joint research and lecturing on ways to advance modern agricultural systems by using suitably designed experiments. Walt introduced design concepts into our thinking. He was a researcher whose contributions made his field both respected and admired. He received worldwide recognition for his accomplishments from the international statistics and scientific communities.

Over and above what he gave us in statistics, Walt was a force of nature: champion bull, bareback, and saddle bronc rider; Little League baseball and ice hockey coach; ballroom-, square-, and tap-dancer; golfer, gardener, and skier; philosopher of statistics and science; agitator for fairness; loving husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather; and friend to hundreds, probably thousands. Walt was strongly rooted in his Christian faith and always said it was a tremendous asset to a healthy, happy, successful personal and professional life.

Walt died on April 14, 2008 at the age of 92, from complications of liver cancer. Walt is survived by his wife of 26 years, Edna Hammond Federer; and her children, Sandra Harle of Jamestown, New York, Suzanne (Thomas) McUmbler of Newark, New York, and Lynn (Lagrand) Chase of Skaneateles, New York; a brother, James (Rose) Federer of Cheyenne, Wyoming; a sister, Barbara (Harry) Epler of Cheyenne, Wyoming; 12 grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild. He was predeceased by his first wife, Lillian Vasey Federer; his son, Arthur John Federer; his brothers, John Henry Federer II, Kenneth (Tuffy) Federer, Melvin (Bud) Federer; and his sisters, Frances Federer Christensen, Ruth Federer, Lydia Federer Foster, Doris Federer Morrison, Esther Federer Thiele, and Alice Federer Pace.

Walt was a loving, compassionate man with a strong desire to give to others. He enjoyed teaching and sharing his knowledge for the betterment of his students, colleagues, family, and community. He was always ready to be a

mentor when he encountered someone he could help. He was devoted to family life and he took great pleasure in playing with his grandchildren. He will be missed and remembered fondly by all who knew him.

Martin Wells, Chairperson; Steven Schwager, Shayle Searle