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A MEMORIAL FOR WILLIAM V. SLITER



ROBERT G. DOUGLAS¹, JERE H. LIPPS², JAMES C. INGLE, JR.³, AND JOHN BARRON⁴

William V. (Bill) Sliter, an internationally known micropaleontologist and research geologist for the U.S. Geological Survey, passed away suddenly, October, 1997, while talking to a colleague in his office. In his honor, B. Huber, T. Bralower, and M. Leckie organized a keynote symposium "Paleoecological and Geochemical Signatures of Cretaceous Anoxic Events" at the 1998 annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in Toronto, Canada. This theme issue of the *Journal of Foraminiferal Research* contains the published papers from the symposium and is dedicated to his memory.

Bill was a native of Los Angeles, California, where he attended high school and received his bachelor's and doctorate degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles. Bill was part of the first group of UCLA graduate students working under the guidance of Helen Tappan in the mid 1960s. A.R. Loeblich, Jr., then at the Chervon research lab in nearby La Habra, was an informal advisor and critic to the group. Helen and Al suggested that Bill study Cretaceous foraminifera while encouraging his diverse interests in the biology and ecology of modern species. In small aquaria located in the basement of the Geology Department, Bill began growing intertidal species, conducting ecological and life cycle experiments and published his first paper on *Rosalina globularis*.

After completing his Ph.D. dissertation on Late Cretaceous foraminifera in southern California and northern Baja California, Mexico, Bill took a job with ESSO (later EXXON) Production Research Company in Houston, Texas, as a research geologist/paleontologist. One of his first projects at EPR was a study of modern depositional environments in the Gulf of Mexico which emphasized a multidisciplinary approach that combined hydrographic, sediments, foraminiferal and molluscan data. It expanded an interest in modern environments that began as a graduate student and laid the foundation for interpreting paleoenvironments that he was to use in much of his later work in biostratigraphy and paleoceanography. Other EPR projects followed, dealing with Tertiary and Cretaceous foraminifera from distant

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locations around the world. Bill greatly enjoyed his colleagues and the geological challenges in petroleum exploration but was uncomfortable with the corporate philosophy. He disliked regimentation and complained that working for a large corporation was too much like being in the army.

In 1972 Bill left EPR and joined the Canadian Geological Survey, in Calgary, where he continued research on Cretaceous foraminifera and Mesozoic biostratigraphy. He was fascinated with the Canadian Arctic islands and developed a background in high latitude Cretaceous microfaunas, valuable knowledge in his later studies of the Cretaceous ocean. However, a year later an opportunity arose to return to his beloved California and he joined the U.S. Geological Survey's Paleontology and Stratigraphy Branch in Menlo Park.

Bill enjoyed a distinguished career in the Survey as a research geologist/paleontologist and administrator. From 1978 to 1983, he served as the Branch Chief for Paleontology and Stratigraphy at USGS headquarters in Reston, Virginia. He was an astute administrator who combined a love of people with excellent communication skills and a sense of humor. It was an effective combination and over the years administrators and colleagues repeatedly turned to Bill for help in solving tough problems. All greatly admired and respected his "people" skills and ability. At the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park Bill Sliter

At the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park Bill Sliter always had his door (and his mind) open to discuss a wide range of geological, work-related, and philosophical issues with scientists, administrative staff, and technicians. He was a calming father-figure to everyone and he had a tremendous gift at helping people look at all sides of a problem and come away with a satisfying plan of action. Of course, he instilled these discussions with his wit and quirky humor, and we all remember his characteristic smile (almost a smirk). He was particularly helpful in leading the paleontology group at Menlo Park through the difficult re-organization beginning in late 1995. Subsequently, as Regional Space Coordinator, he cleared the way for a timely (and largely painless) move of the Marine Geology team back into space on to the main Menlo campus.

He returned to Menlo Park as the study of Mesozoic terrains along the West Coast was getting underway in the Survey and he turned his attention to the Cretaceous limestones exposed in terranes in central and northern California. Many of the limestones had been exploited for cement and were exposed in guarries; all had been deformed and altered. The origin and age of these units were largely enigmatic. They were a major challenge, just the type that Bill loved. Unraveling the puzzle required developing an expertise in identifying foraminifers in thin-sections and in 1984, Bill published the first of several papers describing a Cretaceous biostratigraphic zonation based on foraminifera in thin-section. He became a world authority on working with forams in thin section and traveled extensively in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil to teach the techniques he developed. It was in sharing his expertise with a student at the microscope that Bill experienced his greatest joy.

Piqued by the Cretaceous limestone's and the desire to understand their origins, Bill become involved in the Deep Sea Drilling Project (later the Ocean Drilling Project) and participated in drilling Cretaceous guyots in the mid Pacific. Ultimately he participated in cruises in the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean and was an important contributor to our understanding of Cretaceous oceans.

Bill served the profession well, both within the Survey and in societies. He was a former Director, Editor and President of the Cushman Foundation. He stepped down some years ago, so "younger blood" could have an impact on the Foundation. He continued, however, as an Honorary Director and attended most meetings where his jovial and insightful comments made the discussions fun and effective. With his many colleagues, he was co-covener and organizer of numerous symposia, short courses and field trips on foraminifera and Cretaceous stratigraphy.

To all who knew him, Bill was a special person. He had a inquiring mind that was always probing, questioning and testing. It made him a wonderful scientist. During his career he pursued a diverse range of interests, including living foraminifera and modern environments, the biostratigraphy and paleoecology of Mesozoic microfaunas in whole specimen and thin-section, black shales, Cretaceous biogeography, Mesozoic terrains, Cretaceous paleoceanography and more. But he was also a warm, caring person with a great sense of humor and humility who loved people and to share his knowledge. In his life he touched many lives and enriched them along the way. He will be greatly missed by all of us but especially his wife, Trish, and his children and grandchildren.

We wish to acknowledge the contribution and help of Bill's many, many colleagues and friends in composing this short tribute to his life.

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