

Ron Stark, a well-known forest entomologist, died in Sandpoint, Idaho, on 9 April 2002 of cancer. He was born on 4 December 1922 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, the youngest of eight children of Robert Donaldson Stark and Christina Glen Currie Stark. His father was a railroad employee and later a tailor during the depression. Christina had come to Canada from Scotland.

By his admission, he failed algebra and chemistry in his senior year "having fallen victim to the `fun' life'." It was 1942 (wartime) and jobs were plentiful for preconscription males, and he was content to land a good job in an oil refinery. However, his mother, "a stern disciplinarian," convinced him to make up the two subjects and complete his Matriculation degree. He took a summer course and squeaked through.

That fall, he was accepted into a special officer-training program, but after two years, the Canadian army "decided that my 20/ 400 vision was a greater threat to our troops than to the enemy." It was his family's expectation that he would follow his older brother David in becoming an engineer. However, the dean of engineering decided that he lacked the necessary aptitude for the mathematics involved.

Meanwhile, he had met and become engaged to his future wife, Mary Laurita (Laurie) McMann, a registered nurse who by chance had nursed the dean of the College of Forestry at Toronto. The dean had rhapsodized over the life of a forester and convinced her that it was an ideal life. At her suggestion, Ron studied forestry and graduated from the University of Toronto in 1948.

Just before graduation, chance intervened again. A recruiter from the Forest Biology Division of Canada Agriculture showed up, and Ron was accepted for a position at the new forest entomology lab in Calgary. His enthusiasm evidently outweighed the fact that he had only one course in forest entomology and "had received a C or D in it." His first field season was spent in an abandoned warden's cabin in Banff National Park studying a lodgepole pine needle miner, later named after him (*Recurvaria starki* Freeman). His master's thesis (U. Toronto 1951) dealt with methods of sampling populations of the needle miner in preparation for studying its population dynamics, which was the subject of his doctoral thesis at the University of British Columbia (1958).

Throughout his university experience, Ron learned much about the quality and character of professors and curricula, coming to realize that the best teachers were not necessarily in the classroom, and that teachers who inspired did so because their teaching was not restricted to science but also covered living as a scientist. He singled out two teachers who came close to the ideal: Prof. Diamond of Toronto (with a B.A. degree) who taught anatomy to medical students and history of science and ethics to all; and George Spender of U.B.C. (with an M.A. degree) who taught taxonomy and general entomology and was the unofficial adviser to all graduate students. "Both were great men, unencumbered by awards and honors." However, under other instructors he learned that "a true pedant can stretch a concept that can be grasped in several hours to 3 one-hour lectures a week for eight months."

Ron's reliance on reasoning rather than memory to answer examiners' questions proved traumatic during his qualifying orals for the PhD. The saving grace was an examiner from the humanities with whom he engaged in a lively discussion on the lasting power of Shakespeare and G. B Shaw. He learned later that this person told the others that it was the first science oral he had attended where the candidate knew anything outside his subject. He fared little better during a second examination, but the committee passed him for having done well in defense of his thesis and for his impressive class work. Concerning the latter, he gave credit to the thorough training he received from George Hopping, Officer-in-Charge of the Calgary Lab, regarding the preparation of grammatically and factually correct reports.

In 1958, Ron interviewed for an assistant professor position at University of California, Berkeley, which led to a career in academia. His decision to move to Berkeley was due in part to plans to move the Calgary lab to Edmonton, "a place where no native Calgarian wanted to live or die." But, he learned later from John McSwain that he almost blew the interview seminar by describing the needle miner as resembling a clothes moth. UCB was heavily into taxonomy then, and the statement outraged several professors. His assignment was 90% research on population dynamics of the western pine beetle, *Dendroctonus brevicomis* LeConte. He inherited 10 graduate students from the previous professor and with the aid of "my student slaves" made the associate professor grade and tenure within the mandatory two years. He served as acting chair of the department during 1964-1970.

The work on western pine beetle involved a number of students studying various facets and was centered at the university's Blodgett Experimental Forest in the Sierra Nevada, where a field station was built with funding from the Walker Foundation. The results of this complex study appeared in a 1970 publication edited by Ron and Donald Dahlsten entitled *Studies on the Population Dynamics of the Western Pine Beetle* published by the University of California, Division of Agricultural Science.

In the course of these studies, Ron began a cooperative association with David Wood and UC forest pathologists Fields Cobb and Dick Parmeter involving interactions among pathogens, bark beetles, and forest trees. Among their efforts was a study of the relationship of smog injury and susceptibility to bark beetles, which was published in four *Hilgardia* articles.

During the mid-1960s, Ron became disenchanted with the university's handling of student unrest. He contemplated leaving but decided to go on sabbatical instead. On his return, the Bay Area had lost its appeal. Commuting took an hour. Drug pushers and serious vandalism were reported around his children's school. Thus, in 1970, amidst this discontent, he accepted the position of graduate dean/coordinator of research at the University of Idaho. He was motivated further "...because-I admit it-I had grandiose ideas of how I could improve the academic world in such a position."

He later recalled that the first five years were tolerable, and "we did make an impression both in research funding and in graduate standards but the means led to stiffening opposition and eventually stalled progress." He continued: "My education was broadened into areas of chicanery, double-dealing, backstabbing, and incompetence that I did not believe could persist in academia." Having thus become discouraged, he was ripe for offers, and in 1977, Ron accepted a two-year assignment as assistant program manager of the USDA Douglas-fir tussock moth program at Portland, OR. He enjoyed being in touch again with researchers, many of whom he had associated in some way previously.

In 1981, he again left the University of Idaho; this time for a three-year stint as program manager of the Canada-U.S. (CANUSA) International Spruce Budworm Program-Western Component, at Portland. This assignment proved more difficult; the two components, east and west, were overdirected from Washington, DC, and Ottawa. The situation improved with the appointment of an independent editor, "...one of the best-Martha Brooks - the surrogate mother to all of the scientists at Corvallis." Editing of the final product, the Tussock Moth book, (USDA Forest Service Technical Bulletin No. 1694), was done jointly by Ron, Martha, and Bob Campbell. This proved to be hard work, but they "had fun exposing snow jobs and deciphering jargon." He recalled one classic involving a study on spray technology. In a Germanic sentence consisting of about 50 words of physics jargon, the author easily could have said: "When a droplet strikes a leaf, it stops." Thinking that they had mistranslated the sentence, they phoned the author and got a sheepish admission that he meant just that.

At the two universities, Ron was major professor for 15 persons receiving the Ph.D. degree, 16 master's recipients, and he was a member of 28 thesis committees. His students have invariably done well in their personal and professional lives doubtlessly enhanced by his example.

During his career, Ron received many honors, including an NSF Senior Postdoctoral Fellowship, Entomological Society of Canada Gold Medal for Outstanding Achievement in Entomology, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Certificate of Appreciation for the CANUSA program, and Society of American Foresters Barrington Moore Award for Outstanding Achievements in Forest Biological Research.

He was the third recipient (1993) of the Western Forest Insect Work Conference (WFIWC) Founders Award for his outstanding contributions to forest entomology in the West. In 1984 he helped to form and later chaired the WFIWC History Committee, and he arranged to have the University of Idaho Special Collections Library designated as the depository for records and memorabilia relating to forest entomology. That effort has saved invaluable historical information, including photographs, and stimulated others including one of us (MMF) to publish biographies and accounts of pioneers in this profession that would not have existed otherwise.

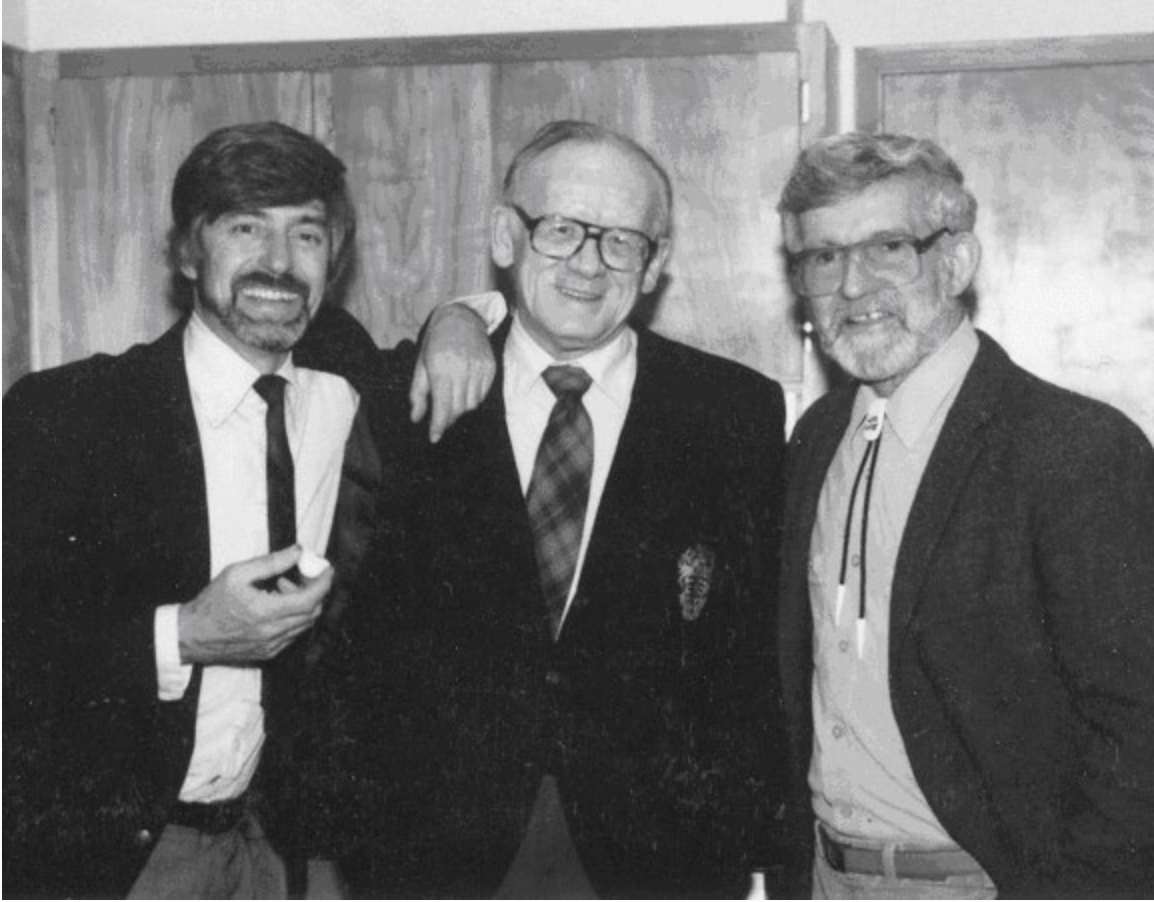
In accord with the saying that "You can tell a lot about a dog's owner by his dog," Ron and Laurie were devoted to Golden Retrievers, a notably sociable breed. Sabu, their latest companion, was taken along on trips and her demeanor so impressed the establishment of hotels that arrangement was made for the "family" to room together. We remember, for instance, the Starks and Sabu emerging in the mornings from the elevator at Hotel Alex Johnson, Rapid City, SD, during the 1995 meeting of the WFIWC, at which he gave his Founders Award address from which quotations herein and other material are derived.

Ron retired from University of Idaho in 1985, and he and Laurie moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, where they remodeled a comfortable two-story home that was built about 1900. There, in the spacious front room with ever-present Sabu tolerating a playful cat, we each have enjoyed a glass of Scotch whisky and engaged in reminiscences.

Belying his strong work ethic and attainment of prominence in position and acclaim, Ron was most of all down-to-earth. He had no airs nor was there any pretense in his openness. His acquaintances universally recall being at ease and comfortable in his presence and in conversation.

His community involvement at Sandpoint included promoting scholarship and education programs with the Elks Club, Friends of the Library, and volunteer work with the Thrift Store that helps to support the city's Panhandle Animal Shelter, to which the family suggests that memorial contributions be sent.

He is survived by Laurie, daughter Debra Macaulay of Tualatin, OR, son David of Blackfoot, ID, four grandchildren, and his beloved Sabu.



*This obituary, published in American Entomologist (49(1); spring 2003), was prepared by:*

*Malcolm M. Furniss - University of Idaho, Moscow, ID*

*Alan A. Berryman - Washington State University, Pullman, WA*

*Donald L. Dahlsten and David L. Wood - University of California, Berkeley, CA*