



## IN MEMORIAM

Grady Webster  
Professor of Plant Biology, Emeritus  
UC Davis  
1927 - 2005

In August, 2005, Grady Webster attended the annual meeting of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists in Austin, Texas, where he both presented a research poster and received the society's Asa Gray Award, an honor bestowed annually "to recognize outstanding scientists for their contributions to systematics research." In recognition of that event, John Beaman prepared a tribute to Grady which was published in the society's journal, *Systematic Botany*, in early 2006. Sadly, the article also ended up serving as an obituary. Because it so eloquently captured Grady's spirit and legacy, with Prof. Beaman's permission, we have excerpted and adapted portions of that tribute in the following paragraphs.

Grady Webster has been publishing since he was six years old. His first publication (in the 1930s), a poem "The Wrens Build a Nest" appeared in Mickey Mouse Magazine and won a prize of \$6. That stream of productivity continued for more than 70 years.

As the title of his first paper suggests, Grady did not start out as a botanist, but in the Austin, Texas, high school he came under the influence of the late Fred Barkley, sometime teacher in that school and, subsequently, at the University of Texas. Grady allowed that a summer field trip to Mexico in 1944 with Barkley and other UT students was the stimulus that got him interested in botany, using Hutchinson's *Families of Flowering Plants* to identify their collections.

In 1947, Grady enrolled in the botany program at the University of Hawaii, where he became seriously affected by asthma. He transferred to the University of Michigan, to work with Rogers McVaugh, who steered him toward the plant family which became his lifelong passion, the Euphorbiaceae. After finishing his Ph.D. in 1954, Grady was awarded an NSF postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard, under the direction of the famous wood anatomist, Prof. I. W. Bailey.

In 1951 Grady went to Cuba and drove the length of the island, finding bizarre species of *Phyllanthus*. In 1953 he was asked to serve as instructor for the Harvard course in Tropical Botany in Cuba. The experiences in Cuba provided an ideal foundation for Grady's work on *Phyllanthus* in the West Indies. He was at Harvard for five years on the NSF fellowship and as a lecturer, but resigned the fellowship in 1955 in order to participate in an expedition to the Karakorum Range in the Himalayas organized by a group of Harvard undergraduates.

While at Harvard, Grady met a student in plant morphology, Barbara Donohue, whom he married in 1956. In 1958 he was hired as an assistant professor at Purdue, where their daughter, Susan, was born. He continued his West Indian expeditions in 1959 and collected specimens in the Lesser Antilles. In 1964 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship at the University of Utrecht; he and the family explored Europe, alternating between

herbaria and museums, studying wood anatomy and pollen morphology. The return from Europe in the summer of 1965 involved stays in the West Indies (Dominica and Jamaica). In 1966 Grady accepted an appointment as Professor of Botany and Director of the Arboretum here at UC Davis. He taught courses in plant geography, pollination biology, and floristics, and directed numerous Botany Ph.D. students. Grady's research travels in the 1970s and 1980s centered in Mexico and later in Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Brazil. Under the auspices of the University Research Expeditions Program (UREP) centered at Berkeley, he led a series of trips to Surinam, Brazil, and Ecuador, where he initiated a floristic survey of the cloud forests in the Maquipucuna Reserve, aided by colleagues, graduate students, and UREP volunteers. Maquipucuna proved to be a remarkable center of plant diversity, and, after 12 years of field work, a floristic inventory was published jointly with Robert Rhode in 2001 by the University of California Press. Within two months he also published, jointly with colleague Conrad Barr, *Changing Plant Life of La Frontera*, based on the Botanical Society of America Past President's symposium he organized for the 1995 AIBS meetings in San Diego.

Grady's research with *Phyllanthus* was the nucleus for his extensive work with much of the family Euphorbiaceae, and he was the leading researcher with this family in the New World over many years. Bill Anderson notes that in a family as large as the Euphorbiaceae it takes a long time for anyone to even learn the work that has gone before and approach the point at which he or she can begin to contribute something new. Further, it takes many more years to achieve the kind of magisterial command of all that material that permits one to publish new information in context, appreciate its significance, and incorporate it in a revised and improved understanding of the group.

The Webster curriculum vitae shows many aspects of his distinguished career, including a Rackham Fellowship at the University of Michigan, an NSF postdoctoral fellowship, a Guggenheim fellowship, a Smithsonian senior fellowship, the Engler Medal, a Merit Award from the Botanical Society of America, and service as Program Director for Systematic Biology at NSF, and President of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, of the Botanical Society of America, and of the California Botanical Society. He participated in six major Flora projects, published four books and 111 articles and book chapters, probably over 70 book reviews, and seven essays. Three more papers were in press at the time of his death, and collaborators are preparing several more for posthumous publication.

Grady was born on April 14, 1927 in Ada, OK and died October 27, 2005. Grady is survived by his wife, Prof. Emerita Barbara Webster, his daughter, Prof. Susan Verdi Webster, his son-in-law, Hernán Navarrete, and numerous nieces and nephews. His presence on our campus and in our herbarium is sorely missed.

Daniel Potter  
Judy Jernstedt  
Michael Sanderson