



Donald A. Rolfs

May 28, 1941 - October 13, 2023

Don passed away in Wenatchee at the age of 82 near midnight on Friday, October 13. He had Parkinsons Disease with Dementia. He was the first son of Herschel and Virginia Rolfs and older brother to Patricia and Allen. He grew up in Yakima and spent many weekends and one full summer at Chinook Pass in a primitive cabin built by his father.

Don earned a doctorate in dentistry from the University of Washington in 1969 and then served for three years in Mannheim, Germany as a dentist in the U.S. Army Dental Corps. Don received post-doctoral training from 1972 to 1975 at the UW in epidemiology and periodontics.

Don married Normandie Daddian in 1963. They had two children: Mike and Kristi. In 1975 he settled with his family in Wenatchee. Don and Mandy divorced in 1986. Don remained in Wenatchee until his death.

Starting in 1959, Don worked 5 summers as a smokejumper for the U.S. Forest Service. In 1975 he opened a private periodontal practice in Wenatchee which he ran for 15 years. He became known for TMJ expertise. In this capacity, he invented and patented an educational device that demonstrates the complex muscle-bone-disc relationships of the human temporomandibular joint, he served as an expert witness in injury cases, and he co-authored a book on the subject.

After closing his practice in 1990, Don served for the next 15 years as a full-time, free-lance dental educator, teaching surgical and diagnostic skills at dental meetings in North American, Canada, and England. He also taught dental ethics at the UW School of Dentistry, and he conceived and initiated the still-popular Mentor Program for dental students at the University of Washington Dental School.

Overlapping his dental educator career, Don's lifelong interest in butterflies grew and Don became a serious lepidopterist. For almost a decade, he organized an annual butterfly count on Chumstick Mountain under the aegis of the North American Butterfly Association, for which he also served as regional editor. He designed and delivered day-long field experiences for the 4-H Forestry program, which was sponsored by the WSU Extension Service. He published local field guides and contributed photographs of pinned specimens to butterfly books authored by his peers. As he left dental education, his interest shifted to moths, for which Don developed new nighttime collection techniques.

In 2007, at age 66, Don turned from butterflies & moths to focus on native bees of Washington. He took the intensive bee course provided by the American Museum of Natural History and committed to full time research and education about native bees. He invented tools and techniques that enhanced both field and laboratory aspects of Native Bee biology. His illustrated program was widely viewed and appreciated between 2013 and 2020.

Don was passionate about his interests and he loved to teach. He was an accomplished mountaineer, photographer, woodworker, and graphic artist. He was a ski patroller at White Pass and a small plane pilot.

Don was preceded in death by his parents and is survived by his sister,

Patricia (Lester); brother, Allen (Kathy); son, Mike (Sara); daughter, Kristi; and two grandchildren, Freya and Taggart.

Tribute Wall

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“ Don's passion for insects and his willingness to share his extraordinary knowledge with others was truly special. As a grad student, I learned a lot from Don about Washington bees and moths, and I've passed on some of that learning in my own work as an environmental educator. He was a dedicated naturalist and educator who had a positive impact on many lives and helped increase the scientific community's understanding of Central Washington's insect diversity.

Nick Engelfried

Nick Engelfried - December 28, 2023 at 11:52 AM

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“ Dear Rolfs Family

I will always remember the fun adventures that Don I shared with other friends fishing in Montana and hiking the Chilkoot Trail from Skagway to British Columbia.

Don also had a deep interest in butterflies and other insects.

He will be missed.

Sincerely,

Earl

Earl Tilly - October 17, 2023 at 06:46 PM