

OBITUARY: Ronald Pyke

1931–2005

RONALD (RON) PYKE passed away on October 22, 2005, as a consequence of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis disease. He was 73.

In the IMS Ron was probably best known as a previous President (1986–7) and as the editor of the fledgling *Annals of Probability* in the first four years of its existence, from 1972 to 1975.

Ron was born on November 24, 1931, in Hamilton, Ontario, and graduated from Westdale High School in Hamilton in 1949. He married Gladys Mary Davey on December 19, 1953, in Hamilton, soon after entering graduate school and they enjoyed 52 joy-filled years together.

Ron graduated with honours from McMaster University in 1953 and then moved to the University of Washington. He completed an MSc in Mathematical Statistics in 1955 and a PhD in Mathematics in 1956 under Bill Birnbaum on the topic “On one-sided distribution free statistics.”

Immediately following his PhD, Ron and Gladys moved to Stanford for two years, followed by another two at Columbia. In 1960 they returned to Seattle, where, except for sabbaticals at Cambridge (64–65), Imperial College (70–71) and the Technion (88), they settled permanently. Ron retired from the University of Washington in 1998.

So much for the dry facts. Now let me try to capture just a little of what we shall all miss about this very special and unique man, who was, in all ways, a fine scholar and true gentleman. Let me start with the scholar.

In his early professional years, Ron made a number of important contributions to topics as diverse as statistical hypothesis testing (mainly centering around Kolmogorov-Smirnov and other goodness of fit statistics), Markov renewal and branching processes, empirical processes, fluctuation theory and two-armed bandits, to give but an abbreviated list. A significant majority of the papers were published in the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, and even briefly running through his early papers one sees any Search Committee’s dream candidate in terms of their breadth and quality.

Beyond contributing to the IMS by merely publishing in its journals, early on Ron began what was to be a lifelong commitment to the Institute by taking an active leadership role. In 1963, at the tender age of 32, Ron chaired his first IMS committee, the Program Committee. As anyone who has ever organized an IMS meeting is well aware, this is one of the IMS’s central committees, and heading it requires dedication, diplomacy, and a fair ability at juggling.



As he was committed to the IMS, so Ron was to UW. When he first arrived at Washington there was no independent Statistics department, and activity in Statistics was concentrated in Mathematics. In 1965 a Biomathematics Group interdisciplinary program was set up, in which Ron was heavily involved. Ron also worked tirelessly towards the establishment of an independent Department of Statistics, which was finally established in 1979, and is now one of the leading departments in the US, with over 25 faculty members. Although Ron originally joined the infant department, he shortly after returned to Mathematics.

In 1973 Ron published his first paper on the Brownian sheet (incidentally, as far as I can determine, also coining the name that then stuck to this remarkable process). While Ron’s interest in the Brownian sheet grew out of his work on Kolmogorov-Smirnov type statistics, from the 1970s onwards he was concerned more with its amazing local sample path properties. He was still working on these problems when he retired—and as late as 1997, one year prior to retirement, Ron and I published a paper on this theme. Retirement did not stop Ron from working, and his last paper, written with long-time friend and colleague Willem van Zwet, appeared, appropriately, in the *Annals of Probability*, in 2004.

Over the years Ron supervised 15 PhD students, many of whom are now well known names in statistics and probability. Since she is close to home, I shall mention only the first: Esther Samuel-Cahn, who was awarded the Israel Prize for Statistical Research in 2004.

As one would expect from a scholar of his calibre, Ron was also a Fellow of the ASA and IMS, an Elected Member of the ISI, and had a long list of invited addresses and other honours. As already mentioned, he served as IMS President in 1986–7, and also as ISI Vice President from 1989 to 1991.

Now let’s turn to the gentleman. When I first met Ron in Sydney in 1978, I was a fresh PhD and Ron was a leading scholar of international renown. I remember his talk in the UNSW Statistics seminar—it was about the Brownian sheet—but far more than that I recall his quiet and gentle ways, his caring about

and encouragement of a young scholar, and his words of advice about what to work on and, more importantly, why one should do so. It was the same tone that I had encountered a couple of years earlier when Ron, as the editor of the *Annals of Probability*, helped an inexperienced PhD student get through the forbidding prospect of publishing his first serious paper. Even in the semi-formal, standardized editorial letters, there was something personal, something encouraging, something which was just right to chase away the fears and frustrations of youth.

As the years went by I continued, as did many others, to turn to Ron for advice. He always listened, always had good ideas, and was ever gentle and considerate. The quiet self-confidence mixed with a low key demeanour came from a number of sources, but mainly, I believe, from a deep personal contentment. Ron loved his wife and family with all his heart, and they reciprocated accordingly. He loved his Redmond farm, where for many years he raised Black Angus cattle, and delighted to take visitors to Seattle on tours around it.

Who could forget—especially those of us who were city born and bred—the sometimes questionable delights of tiptoeing, in borrowed boots, through the minefields left behind by the cattle, as Ron pointed out which cow would be the next to deliver while simultaneously discussing the singularities of Brownian sheets. Also not to be forgotten was the voluminous barn, where, while deftly picking through owl boluses, Ron offered insights on the search for multi-dimensional variants of the classic one-dimensional distribution free tests.

Ron was a devout Christian. He enjoyed discussions on comparative religion and theology, but never with the aim of converting anyone to his own beliefs, rather to share and learn through discussion. He served as a Deacon at First Baptist Church of Eastgate and an Elder at Westminster Chapel in Bellevue, active in teaching and music.

In fact, in all that he did—whether it was research, university, family, church or interpersonal relationships—the same key word always surfaces: *service*. Perhaps this is why we shall all miss him so much.

In addition to his beloved wife Gladys, Ron is survived by three sons and daughter, two brothers (one a minister) and a sister, ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

*Robert Adler
Technion, Haifa.*

Camilo Dagum passed away

Samuel Kotz wrote to tell us about the passing away in Ottawa of Camilo Dagum on November 5. Camilo was a Professor in the University of Ottawa for many years, and more recently at the University of Bologna in Italy. He was a leading economist and statistician, an expert on income distributions and human capital. He was a recipient of numerous awards and *Honorari Causa* doctorates.

IMS Carver Medal: for 'unsung heroes'

Do you know someone who has worked exceptionally hard for IMS, who deserves a little credit for all their work over the years? There is still time to nominate that someone for the 2006 IMS Carver Medal. The award was created by the IMS in honor of Harry C Carver, Founding Editor of the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics* and one of the founders of the IMS. The medal is for **exceptional service specifically to the IMS** and is open to any member of the IMS who has not previously been elected President.

The medal will be awarded at a ceremony during the IMS Annual Meeting in Rio de Janeiro (see www.imstat.org/meetings/ims2006/).

To nominate someone for this award, please check the requirements at <http://www.imstat.org/awards/carver.html>

The deadline for receipt of nominations is **February 1, 2006**.

