In Memoriam:
Arent H. “Barry” Schuyler  1923 – 2011

Reflections On a Remarkable Man,
Barry Schuyler
By Robert Wilkinson

I’d like to offer a few reflections on a few lessons I learned from Barry relating to navigation, sailing, mountains, learning, and life.

Navigation
Barry was a navigator.
Navigation involves skill and judgment, knowledge and experience, and an ability to sort out important information from noise – sometimes very quickly. The sound of waves on the rocks through the fog – data on energy, ecosystems, climate, and demographics.

Barry was patient, but he was also clear about the urgency of the challenges we face. He helped us learn to navigate in so many ways, especially through life, just as on the seas and over mountains.

At sea, the stars provide a map. But, as in other realms, one needs to know how to read it. Peter Schuyler, following in Barry’s wake, is an expert at reading that map. (He does it so well, that sailing together from Hawaii to Santa Barbara, he was exactly on course to Santa Barbara using only a sextant and the stars.) Like their dad, Kate, Ann, John, and Peter, learned what to read, and how to read it. Navigating in other arenas is similar. We need a frame of reference to be able to use the information we have, just as one needs the horizon as well as the stars and sun to navigate.

Barry was a dedicated teacher, demonstrating through his actions and deeds, not just words, how to sort out what is important. I recall vividly a conversation we had in the late 1970s. He was reflecting on the challenges of our time, and he looked at me and said, the problem your generation will face is how to deal with too much information. How to sort our what is important from all the rest. How prescient he was. Perhaps more importantly, I’m reminded how important those conversations around the campfire, and the cabin, and the living room, really are!

Sailing
Barry loved the mountains and the sea – and Mozart. He was a master sailor and he knew the channel islands better than anyone I have known, every cove, and harbor, and rock – except one that’s not on the charts – in Cuylers Harbor on San Miguel Island. It accounted for a serious hip dislocation. He made the long voyage home from that trip in a full body splint, rigged with an oar.

I’ve lost track of the number of times we visited San Miguel and the other Channel Islands. And there were sails up the coast to San Francisco, down to Mexico, and back from Hawaii. Many wonderful memories come to mind.

Back in the “good old days” San Miguel Island was run by the Navy. We would hike all over the island, marveling at the natural wonders – from the pinniped rookery to the caliche forests. Barry would seek formal permission to land, of course. He always tried to play by the rules. The Navy brass once sputtered in response that the island was very sensitive habitat and might be impacted by visitors, and besides, they were bombing it. We were never hit by the bombs, and we left it in good shape for the park service. (The island was later managed by a sailing buddy of Barry’s.)

Barry was very much at home in a boat, as Jean is with horses. Jean is a master in the saddle. (Barry, like me, was never all that comfortable on a horse. His assessment: they are “dangerous on both ends, and uncomfortable in the middle.”) Jean, on the other hand, is comfortable on boats, and on horses. From this there are insights to be gained into how Barry and Jean shared so much, and gave so much, in their two-thirds of a century together.
Mountains

The mountains, like Barry and Jean, are deeply inspiring.

Barry was at home in the mountains, especially the Sierra Nevada, John Muir’s range of light. I learned just recently, chatting in front of the fire at the Schuyler home, of the family’s special friendship with John Muir, and of Muir’s last visit to Yosemite. Another member of the family chaired the board of the Sierra Club and hired a young man named David Brower to run the outfit Muir set up. Dave was a frequent visitor to Environmental Studies and a friend of Barry and Jean’s.

My family, Pam and our three boys, have many fond memories of skiing, hiking, and camping in the Sierra with Barry and Jean. We enjoyed hiking off-trail across the magnificent Sierra landscape, camping by streams and lakes, climbing peaks, and watching the Perseid meteor showers in mid-summer. Barry once took an unscheduled “flight” and an unintentional short-cut down from Rafferty Peak in Yosemite. The maneuver involved a full free-fall – landing in large, sharp, talus. It was amazing he survived. He was pretty hard on those legs.

He was a remarkably tough guy. That was when he started his “frequent-flier” account with the Yosemite rescue helicopter folks. (He earned more miles on another adventure.) David Brower was the first to call Barry after the Rafferty Peak episode.

Learning

Barry taught, among other things, knowledge, understanding, and humility. He also taught important subjects like compassion, listening skills, keeping an open mind, maintaining a passion for life and learning, and always keeping a sense of humor. As his son Peter put it, “He allowed people to feel heard, rather than judged.”

And he embodied the quintessential lifelong combination of teacher and student. As chair of Environmental Studies in the 1970s, Barry led the program at a critical time. The 1970s was a unique time to be studying energy, the environment, and all the rest. It’s worth remembering than when Barry was teaching courses on energy, and Marc McGinnies was teaching environmental law (and founding the EDC), Paul Wack was teaching planning, and Oran and Cindy Sage were teaching environmental impact analysis, the very laws and policy frameworks we now take for granted were just being invented – NEPA, CEQA, Clean Air and Water, ESA, and so on.

Garrett had just penned “Tragedy of the Commons” the year before ES was born. The Santa Barbara oil blowout (1969) had just changed the nation’s perceptions on the environment; the Stockholm conference (1972) was the first major UN conference on the environment, and so much more all occurred in the space of a few years.

Barry had a way of riding the crest ahead of the “mainstream”. Years later the “official consensus” would catch up. He brought a young fellow named Amory Lovins to UCSB to talk about a new book he had just written, Soft Energy Paths, and a Foreign Affairs article by the same name. (The article turned out to be one of the most reprinted pieces ever published in Foreign Affairs, and Amory went on to become one of the most influential voices in the world on energy policy.

Barry was famous for advising students “never let the university get in the way of your education.” In part, his point was that life is an ongoing education. The university is just one part of the journey. I recall wonderful conversations with Barry, Garrett Hardin, Dana Meadows, and others about systems dynamics, environmental issues, and the human prospect. The human dimensions of environmental issues were very much a part of the ES program back to the very beginning.

Guiding the ES program here at UCSB in the early years, Barry applied his formidable navigation and diplomacy skills. As chair of ES in the early days, he had the challenging task of building a new program and major in the era of disciplines, and in treacherous and ever-present academic cross-currents. Barry was adept, and highly successful, in gaining support from Chancellor Vernon Cheadle and distinguished faculty members across the campus.

The legacy of Barry Schuyler is in part his mastery of “teaching” at all levels – including to the teachers. We can celebrate the wisdom this man provided, the lessons, and the aspirations for the earth and for humanity. And we can, as Barry showed us so well, be passionate about the important things in life, from the local to global.

To all of us, for Barry and in the spirit of celebration, let me simply say as he would: “CHEERS!”

Arent H. “Barry” Schuyler Memorial site: http://www.forevermissed.com/barryschuyler/lifestory#lifestory