

Memorial of Louis S. Walter, 1933–2000

F. DONALD BLOSS

Department of Geological Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, U.S.A.

On February 1, 2000, after his lung surgery five weeks earlier, the world lost a blithe spirit, Louis S. Walter. Adult respiratory distress syndrome had finally stilled the glorious voice for which Lou was well known. Several years earlier, three heart attacks had failed to do it. Nor had they dulled the brightness of the warm personality that was Lou. When a fellow member of Music and Drama Productions (MAD), a theater group Lou co-founded, was wheeled up to a recovery bed after heart surgery, the man was too exhausted to wonder about the room's other occupant who was within a curtain-surrounded bed. Somewhat later he heard a German-accented female voice ask the other patient if he was ready. The reply was affirmative and from behind the curtain two voices burst into song, singing an operatic aria in German. He recognized the voice and pulled the curtain aside to see Lou singing away with a Brunhilde-type nurse. Each morning and each evening thereafter, the two sang operatic pieces in German.

Lou was an ardent thespian with great stage presence. His favorite roles in MAD productions were Emile de Becque in *South Pacific* (1973), Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* (1974), and Joe Boyd, Sr., in *Damn Yankees* (1999). Despite the ravages of chemotherapy and radiation treatments for lung cancer, Lou never missed a performance during *Damn Yankees*, his final performance three months before his death at age 66.

Lou was awarded a B.S. in Geology from the City College of New York (1954), an M.S. in Geology from the University of Tennessee (1955), and a Ph.D. in Geochemistry from the Pennsylvania State University (1960). He was a Fellow of the Mineralogical Society of America and of the Meteoritical Society.

In 1962, Lou became a research associate in the Theoretical Division of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Goddard Space Flight Center. As a research scientist, he studied the moon rocks in 1967 and 1968 and held various managerial positions throughout his career including head of Goddard's Planetology Branch and chief of its Earth Surveys Application Division. At his retirement in 1997, he was associate director of the Earth Sciences Directorate at Goddard Space Flight Center.

Lou published over 100 papers and abstracts. The Geochemistry Laboratory that he set up examined meteorites and tektites and became pre-eminent in the area of extraterrestrial materials. He thus initiated and led Goddard's program in lunar sample analyses, an effort that grew to worldwide caliber and gained international respect. He also fostered the development of ecological and geodynamics research at Goddard, developed by NASA's research program on the climatic effects of explosive volcanism, and developed and managed NASA's program for mitigating the social effects of natural disasters.



This latter represented a reprise of his 1980 work as a staff member of the U.N. Office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator in Geneva. After his retirement from Goddard in 1997, Lou joined the Research faculty of the George Washington University's Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management. At the time of his death he was working on a book about disasters and remote sensing/satellite technology.

It was my great good fortune to serve as Lou's academic advisor while he pursued a master's degree at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Thus began a friendship that has enriched my life.

Lou leaves behind a talented and attractive family. Surviving are his wife of 26 years, Sandra Zink Walter, four children, and a son-in-law. Also surviving are the many fond memories of Lou in the minds and hearts of those fortunate to have known him.

A younger colleague for whom Lou served as a mentor writes, "They say that 'great men' are measured not by how much they loved, but by how much they were loved by others. By this measure I am confident that Lou was truly a 'great man.'"

To those words, I add lines from P.B. Shelley's *To a Skylark* because they fit Lou well:

Hail to thee, Blithe Spirit!
.....
And singing still dost soar,
And soaring ever singest.