



William J. Bair, Ph.D.

July 14, 1924 — May 19, 2015

The following remembrance was modified slightly from <https://www.sunsetgardenstricities.com/obituaries/2015/may/william-j-bair-phd>

Dr. William [Bill] J. Bair passed away following a brief battle with cancer. The world has lost a gentle giant, a renowned radiation biologist and a wonderful gentleman. Bill was born in Jackson, Michigan and grew up in central Ohio. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II in the 97th Infantry Division as a rifleman. He received the Bronze Star and served in both the European and Pacific Theaters.

Upon his return home, he attended Ohio Wesleyan receiving a B.A. in Chemistry. From there he attended the University of Rochester School of Medicine in Rochester, New York. As J. Newell Stannard's first graduate student, Bill earned the world's first Ph.D. in Radiation Biology. While attending the University of Rochester, Bill met and married Barbara Sites. After graduating he and Barbara decided to accept a position at the Hanford Site in Richland, Washington with the General Electric Company (later Battelle Northwest) intending to stay for two to three years. It was at Hanford that Bill began a very prolific career studying the biological health effects of plutonium and other radioactive materials. His research on the effect of particle size as it affected retention and translocation of materials led to improved dosimetric models. He has over 200 peer reviewed papers.

Bill served on or chaired numerous national and international committees that established standards and guidance for health and regulatory agencies. He was the team lead for the clean-up of the Marshall Islands after atomic-bomb testing, served as an advisor during the Three Mile Island accident, the Chernobyl disaster, and other world events involving potential health threats from radioactive materials.

Bill was first elected to the National Council of Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) in 1974 and served until 1992 when he was elected as a Distinguished Emeritus Member. He served on numerous NCRP scientific and administrative committees including the Board of Directors from 1976 to 1981. Bill was chair of SC 4-1 which produced the seminal NCRP Report No. 161, entitled Management of Persons Contaminated with Radionuclides: Handbook. In 1997 he was the 21st Lauriston S. Taylor Lecturer of NCRP where his presentation was on "Radionuclides in the Body: Meeting the Challenge." Bill also served on committees of the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Agency, the National Academy of Sciences, the World Health Organization, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Energy Research and Development Agency, and the U.S. Department of Energy.

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As a result of Bill's dedication to science, he received numerous honors, awards and recognition from national and professional organizations. He founded the Herbert M. Parker Foundation in 1987, which was incorporated into Washington State University Foundation in 1997 to support student scholarships, public lectures and specialized library resources in support of the radiological sciences.

While building his career at Hanford, Bill and Barbara began building their family. They had three sons, William J., Michael B., and Andrew E. All three followed their father into the sciences, which was a source of pride for Bill. Bill and Barb never did leave Richland. Bill was a renaissance man developing many hobbies including woodworking and carving, complex model ship building, growing award winning orchids, and an avid fly fisherman (made fishing rods for himself and family). He also dabbled in the arts by painting, creating glass tile mosaics, enamel on copper, and, of course, photography, which was turned into amazing calendars for Christmas gifts. Despite all of Bill's activities and achievements, he always had time to devote to his family and taught his boys many life skills.

Bill is survived by his wife of 63 years, Barbara , sons Bill (Marie), Mike (Elaine), Andy, grandchildren Heather, Rochelle, Braden, and Tommy, brother Robert Dean Bair, sister Phyllis J. Blair (Donald), and many nieces and nephews.