

In Celebration and Loving Memory of Vincent P. Guinn:

Nov. 9th, 1917 – Nov. 7th, 2002

Professor Vincent Perrie Guinn led a very full, accomplished life that enriched the lives of many, many others. Whether a family member, friend, colleague, or acquaintance, within spending a few moments with him it was clear he was an unique, fascinating individual. Those who got to know him well felt privileged to have done so. Despite all of his professional accomplishments and deserved world-wide renown, he despised pompousness, and was simply “Vince” to all. He knew how to enjoy the simple things in life and that sharing such moments with those who mattered most to him was perhaps the greatest joy of all.

Vince was born on November 9th, 1917 in Los Angeles, California to Marie Mortensen and Perrie V. Lundin. Early in his life his parents divorced, his mother re-married and he subsequently had his name legally changed to Guinn to honor his step-father who raised him. Throughout his early years he developed a strong love of the outdoors and developed into quite an athlete. Besides enjoying hiking and the rigors and rewards of mountain climbing, he once in high school came within one-tenth of a second of the world record in the 100 yard dash.

His real passion was in academics, however. While initially thinking he would become an architect, he eventually gravitated towards the sciences, receiving his A.B. and M.S. degrees in chemistry from the University of Southern California, where he was Valedictorian, and ultimately receiving his Ph.D. degree in physical chemistry in 1949 from Harvard University. He did this while working several jobs to support his young family. While at the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies, he studied radiochemistry and realized he had a great affinity for the subject. Soon he was head of the Radiochemistry Group of the Shell Development Company in Emeryville, CA, a position he held from 1956-61. In 1961 he moved to the General Atomic Division of what was then the General Dynamics Corporation in San Diego, CA, where he was the Technical Director of the Activation Analysis Program. Thus began his fruitful and innovative career in the field of neutron activation analysis (NAA).

Vince was one of the first to recognize the potential of NAA for forensic applications. His earliest publications and scientific lectures strongly influenced developments in this field. In addition, he produced for the Atomic Energy Commission two short films on the application of NAA to crime investigation. I have not seen these films but I'm sure Vince's dashing, distinguished demeanor must have been quite different from the white-coated scientist caricature of the day. In 1964, he was awarded the American Nuclear Society's Special Award for Novel Applications of Nuclear Energy, being specifically cited for his forensic activation work. He had previously been made a fellow of the American Nuclear Society, a similar honor was bestowed on him by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in 1964, and subsequently by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Dr. Guinn originated the use of NAA in the detection of gunshot residue on the hands of a shooter and the trace element characterization of

evidence specimens of bullet lead, techniques that became routinely used in forensic crime investigation.

He continued his expansive research in these areas while a Professor of Chemistry at the University of California, Irvine from 1970-88 and, finally, as a Visiting Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. His achievements were recognized through a steady stream of published, influential research (over 260 papers), numerous awards and his selection as chairman or honorary president of many international conferences. He was the 1979 recipient of the George Hevesy Medal, an international award for which his pioneering work in radiochemistry, neutron activation analysis as well as his leadership in educating the public, other professions, and students in these areas was cited. Vince's expertise became eagerly sought after. He appeared as an expert witness in over 150 criminal cases (either prosecution or defense, depending on whose side he felt the evidence supported, and turned down work when it wasn't supportable) and was an invited lecturer to investigative agencies in 33 countries around the world (including the FBI and INTERPOL). He was asked to reinvestigate the bullet-lead specimens involved in the Kennedy assassination and was featured in two documentary films on the subject. In 1989, a four-day symposium on neutron activation analysis was named in his honor that featured speakers from 15 countries.

While Vince's professional accomplishments are extremely numerous, he remained at heart a "people" person. He was an outgoing social person who enjoyed first and foremost meeting with and entertaining his colleagues. He did this both very publicly, as the president of international conferences, and privately, at home, with a few guests. His diplomatic and delightful manner of handling meetings amongst scientists from many nations put him in wide demand as a meeting organizer and lecturer. His specialty was to organize and then host informal social hours at his hotel. He loved a good heated conversation over great meals, seasoned liberally with humor, or sharing a fascinating story over well-chilled champagne and a dessert of homemade apple pie, sharp cheese and vanilla ice cream, with his trusted pipe close at hand. Most of all Vince cherished the company of family and friends, the value of which he held most dear. This was made incredibly apparent in the immediate responses from his friends to the news of his passing this past week, some of whom are here today, some of whom are scattered around the world and could not make it in person, but are here in spirit. I think it is appropriate to read a few excerpts:

"My condolences with the passing of Vince Guinn; all of us who had the privilege of knowing him will continue to share the many good memories that we so highly treasure. All of us learned so much from his professional attitude to science, but at the same time Vince was always great at organising festivities wherever we met in this wonderful world."

- Colleague from Denmark

"It is with much sadness that my wife and I learned just now of Vince's passing. As you know we were close friends as well as colleagues for

40 years and he will be greatly missed by all his colleagues and peers who respected him so much as a pioneer in his field."

-Colleague and longtime friend from Toronto, Canada

Vince had a strong impact on his many students throughout the years, such as typified by the following from a prior student, now residing in Arizona:

"I originally met him in 1985 through an undergraduate and at first he scared me-he seemed so sharp and smart and tough. Then I got to know him, and then I took a class from him, and the rest is history. His overwhelming kindness, his ability to help even lost cases like me, and his dignity and honour and class even in the face of people who were so below him or who did not treat him with the respect he deserved amazed me and made me want to emulate him all the more. I truly tell you he was so very beloved by many, many students who literally would have been lost without him."

Those who knew Vince later in life also knew that his wife Dr. Maria Gavrilas-Guinn, made a great man much, much greater. From a colleague in Texas:

"Maria, I am so sorry for your loss. His passing saddens all of us who knew and respected him for his tremendous achievements and for his great friendship. I will always remember Vince and your kind invitation to your home during the last Modern Trends in Activation Analysis conference. I was proud and honored to have been included."

And from another from Vienna, Austria:

"I still have vivid and very pleasant recollections of the last time that I met him (and you) in your home following the MTAA conference in April 1999. Your kind hospitality then, and the nice speech that Vince made about me, were something very special for me.

This must be a very difficult time for you now. I hope that you will draw strength from the fact that many many people around the world are thinking about Vince just now, about his warm personality, and about the many ways in which he inspired and helped them."

This Modern Trends reception in 1999, dreamed up by Vince and executed to perfection by Maria, provided a perfect denouement to Vince's career and an opportunity to meet with those who had become so important to him throughout the years.

Finally, the following from Russia expresses what was most important to him.

"Please accept the words of deepest condolence and great sorrow that Professor Vincent Guinn passed away. I know how dear he was to you, and your unbelievably beautiful Love Story with Vince was a Light for the many of us who had happiness to see you both in your best years. You were such a wonderful, harmonic couple rare to meet.

Russian colleagues, those whom Professor Guinn new in person, will never forget him.”

On a personal note, I had the privilege of knowing Vince over the past five years when I became part of his wonderful family. I can personally attest to the sentiments expressed in these messages. Vince was a fountain of fascinating stories and insights and I took them all in during many shared visits. We had a special pact that we would laugh at each other’s jokes, whether or not the mirth was warranted. Sometimes we would jokingly question how two guys like us could end up being married to two of the most beautiful, dynamic, sweetest women in the world, Maria and her lovely daughter Mirela. And boy can they cook! My memory is not good enough to recall the number of times we would wearily push ourselves back from another fantastic meal of juicy steak, crab cakes, or Maria’s ultimate specialty, sarmalutze (cabbage rolls stuffed with spiced minced meat), and Vince would state “Well, I think that’s the best meal I’ve ever had but I cannot tell for sure from such a small sample size...” The memories and great friendship I had with Vince will last a lifetime. Maria’s children, Mirela and Mitch, wish to express that while Vince never actively sought to become a father figure to them, he naturally became a beloved one. One of Vince’s proudest moments was giving away Mirela at our wedding, an act that Mirela deeply appreciated. In the last weeks of his life, he expressed in many ways the overriding importance of family and friends, as that which truly defines our legacy.

Vince leaves his wife, Maria, his children, Cheryl Long-Riffle and Terry Guinn, and his step-children Mirela and Mitch Gavrilas, along with two granddaughters, a grandson, two great-grandchildren and countless other friends. I know I speak for all those who had the privilege of knowing him that he will be deeply, deeply missed.

In closing, I would like to read an excerpt from his citation for the 1979 Hevesy medal:

“Whether in the laboratory, the classroom, the courtroom, or a drawing room, Vincent P. Guinn is always at home, always interesting to be with, and always a gentlemen.”

May his memory be eternal!

-written by Christopher M. Teixeira, son-in-law to Vincent P. Guinn