

*David Shotwell Wood (BS '41, MS '46, PhD '49), professor of materials science, emeritus, died March 12 of cancer. Born in Akron, Ohio, he attended Pasadena City College before transferring to Caltech.*

*He chaired or served on innumerable campus committees, was Associate Dean of Students, and was variously mayor, city councilman, and planning commission member for the city of Sierra Madre, director of the San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District, and director of the Pasadena Symphony Association.*

*These remarks are adapted from the memorial service held in Dabney Lounge on April 16.*

## DAVID S. WOOD 1920-1998

I have had the good fortune to have been associated with David for half a century. First he was my mentor, then a fellow faculty member and a close personal friend.

It started when I was hired as an undergraduate research assistant, working with David on the design of a system to initiate yielding in metals. My contributions were minimal, but it was a great opportunity to learn. David had already built several unique facilities, including one for the fast propagation of compressive waves—basically a slingshot powered by giant rubber bands that fired one metal rod into another. These devices led to his invitation to join the Manhattan Project's mechanical-design group at Los Alamos. There he met and married Constance, better known to us as Connie. After the war, he returned to Caltech and materials research. Along with rapid loading, he was especially interested in the strain waves produced by impact and explosive loading. He also studied how metals fracture, and the behavior of the crystal dislocations that lead up to it. In 1950, he and Don Clark won the American Society for Testing Materials's Templin Award for their work

on plastic deformation. His interest in the dynamic properties of materials was contagious—so contagious that I caught it. Later, he was on my thesis committee, and we've since coauthored a number of experimental and theoretical papers.

This association naturally led to close ties between the Vreelands and the Woods—after all, our family initials are next to each other in the alphabet. We shared in the joy of the births of our children, and in their growth into adulthood. Our banjo-playing son was warmly welcomed into the Caltech Stock Company by the Woods, who introduced him to the talented staff (or should I say characters?) and made him feel he belonged.

I will always remember David for his mentoring, for our friendship, as well as for his remarkable spirit and bravery in the fight against his terminal disease.

*Thad Vreeland Jr. (BS '49, MS '50, PhD '52), professor of materials science, emeritus*

Our mother was a professional singer and a pianist. Our father, besides being a mechanical engineer, played the fiddle. A family friend, a local bank teller, played the cello. Every Thursday night was trio night at our house. As little kids we were allowed to stay up until the cellist arrived and did some rumbles on his low strings for us. We went to sleep blissfully listening to a Mendelssohn, Arensky, or Beethoven trio.

In 1937, my father bought a 1936 Ford V-8 deluxe four-door sedan, with a chrome-wire steering wheel, a pink plastic gearshift knob, and a radio. We spent so much time in the garage listening to that radio that it was decided to have one in the

house. We got a Zenith AM/short-wave tabletop, and listened to the NBC Symphony with Toscanini, the New York Philharmonic, the Firestone Hour with Richard Crooks, the Metropolitan Opera, and, of course, KFAC's old Gas Company programs.

As teenagers, we went to the Hollywood Bowl, where we could hear great music without today's airplane noise and freeway traffic. And we sang in the Ascension Church choir in Sierra Madre. Dave's singing was not pretty, but he was accurate—and loud. Later, when my mother, Dave, Connie, and I sang in the Pasadena Community Chorus, I remember sitting between Hans Lehman, a German house painter, and Dave. I couldn't hear myself. Loud was fine for Beethoven's Ninth, but not good for the requiems of Fauré and Mozart. I remember Dr. Lert, the Pasadena Symphony conductor, telling us to stop bellowing.

But it was a great experience for us, and I'm sure contributed to Dave's stirring performances in Kent Clark's musicals.

*Alan Wood  
JPL public information specialist, retired*

Anyone who knows Dave Wood knows that he was a joy to be around. Aside from all his technical accomplishments and his with-it grasp of the world we inhabit, he had a calm unthreatened optimism, a taste for exploration and adventure, and a great sense of fun. His laugh will echo in the memory of his friends like a favorite song. In the past few years we have all learned, the hard way, that Dave also had the courage of a lion—a cheerful resilience that would make Stoics like Marcus Aurelius sound like sniveling children.



In the Caltech Stock Company's 1959 production, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Watson), a serape-clad David Wood tried to lure Earnest Watson away from Caltech to sunny Mexico.



**"Nineteen hundred thirty-three and Long Beach rocked and rumbled."**

**From left: Oliver, Knowles, Wood, and Corcoran brought down the house at the DuBridge farewell in a way no earthquake ever could.**

But to me, the first images of Dave that leap to mind are of Dave the performer—the singer, actor, and invaluable member of the now-legendary Caltech Stock Company. Scenes from shows, rehearsals, cast parties, and special events will charm and comfort us for as long as we remember anything.

To understand this odd state of affairs it is necessary to understand two facts about Caltech. The first is that the Caltech faculty and staff and their spouses constitute a family. (It is not true, incidentally, that we are a family because no one else can stand us. We are a family because no one else can *understand* us in the depth that our fellow members do.) The second fact is that the Stock Company was a special subset of the Caltech family devoted to musical comedy, to honoring our great friends, and to explaining the family to itself.

Now the Caltech family takes a lot of explaining. It is, shall we say, different, if not systematically deranged, and the Stock Company over 20 years and some 10 shows never could explain it all, or exploit all the rich comedy intrinsic in it. But we tried. And for this—for performing musical comedy and under-

standing Caltech—Dave Wood had several great advantages.

First off, Dave could actually sing. After he and Connie joined us, we would never have dreamed of staging a show without them. Dave had some other virtues that he shared with his Stock Company friends. He had a fine sense of humor and great enthusiasm; he was reliable as a Swiss watch; and he was a quick study. (I should add that the Stock Company had the highest per-capita IQs in the history of show business).

Finally, and perhaps most important, was the fact that Dave was the genuine Caltech article. He had taken all three degrees here (which should get him a purple heart with two oak-leaf clusters), and he knew the Caltech faculty like a book. (I almost said "comic book.") When we recruited him, he had already earned his way into the Caltech family and become a connoisseur of Caltech characters. So when he sang about the Caltech scene, he sang as an authority.

I can't overemphasize this point—you don't become a *real* member of the Caltech family simply by showing up. You become a member by attrition and by years of shared experience. You know

you have arrived when you quit saying "those flakes" and start saying "our flakes."

Anyway, the Caltech Stock Company existed for the purpose of reminding us that we *are* a family, that we're all in this weird enterprise together, and that we really wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

For this reason, it was absolutely essential that key parts should be played by genuine Techers—the faculty and the marvelously talented students and staff we have co-opted over the years. I like to believe that the scripts are funny and the songs at least droll. But they would lose a whole dimension of comedy if they were not delivered by great family members like Ward Whaling, Dick Jahns, Ed Hutchings, Mu Harvey, Bill Corcoran, and Virginia Kotkin—to name a few.

Perhaps the most famous number that Dave and his cronies—this time Jim Knowles, Bill Corcoran, and Bob Oliver—ever performed was their 1969 rendition of "The Richter Scale" in a farewell show for Lee Dubridge. Dave's solo begins, "Nineteen hundred thirty-three and Long Beach rocked and rumbled." The show was recorded and that song has been played for years on records and tapes, even getting national airplay on *The Dr. Demento Show*. But unless you actually saw the performance on the Beckman stage and watched those clowns collapse you can never get the full effect. And, of course, you will never be truly happy.

The last formal full-length production of the Company was *Beautiful Beckman* in 1975, but ensembles and individuals gave many performances afterward for special occasions—even a couple of half-hour shows. One such occasion was the Athenaeum retirement party for Robert P. Sharp—a marvelous guy and deservedly a

Caltech Icon. The song was called "C-Sharp." Dave and Connie sang it as a duet. They delivered it, of course, like the real pros that they are. Long after I have forgotten my own name, I will still hear them singing "C-Sharp."

The final episode I will indulge in was suggested to me the other day when Connie, with a pleased laugh, reminded me that Dave and Cynthia Corngold danced together in the Beckman show. The words were hardly out of her mouth when the whole scene came back in 3-D. I was standing in the wings, left front, where I could look across and see Elliott Davis and his musical group (which included Thad Vreeland's son, Mike, on the banjo and my son, Don, on the guitar). The number was called "A Nice Place Like This"—a reprise of "A Nice Girl Like You." The nice place referred, of course, to Beckman Auditorium—and by extension to Caltech. The ensemble had already sung the first chorus and was going into a dance that Fritzi Culick had choreographed. The dancers—Fritzi, Cynthia, Virginia, Jackie Knowles, and Betty Hanson; Dave, Dan Erickson, Gary Lorden, Dick Dean, and Jim—were a distillate of the Stock Company. The movements were elegant, to a melody line carried by the electric guitar. I was giddy with admiration.

With Connie's permission, that is where I will leave Dave: safe with his sub-family and his extended family, hearing and probably humming "A Nice Place Like This" (and it *is* a nice place), and dancing with Cynthia Corngold.

*J. Kent Clark*  
*professor of literature, emeritus*  
*(delivered in absentia by Robert*  
*Oliver, professor of economics,*  
*emeritus)*