Robert Macleod Storm

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ROBERT MACLEOD (DOC) STORM has always considered himself a naturalist, and we would argue that many of the attributes that make a person an exceptional natural historian are probably heritable genetic traits. This is an untestable hypothesis, but we hope readers will allow us some latitude, particularly in this venue. We believe that we speak for all of his friends, family, former students, and colleagues when we refer to him as the Dean of Pacific Northwest Herpetology. Bob Storm arrived on a train in Corvallis, Oregon, in 1939 and has never left except for a stint as a medic in World War II. He earned both a Master’s and a Ph.D. from Oregon State Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) and was hired as an instructor in the Zoology Department at OSU in 1948. He rose through the academic ranks to professor and advised a small army of graduate students and undergraduate zoology majors until his retirement in 1984 after 36 years of service.

Doc Storm was born on 9 July 1918 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to William Burns Storm and Nellie Haley Storm. At the time of his birth, Doc’s father ran a wheat farm owned by his wife’s parents, and it was on that farm that Doc and three more Storm children gained an appreciation for nature. In the mid-1920s, the family moved to Portland, Oregon, where his father joined one of his brothers in a construction business. Working in Portland, the elder Storm received word from another brother in Illinois informing him of an opening at Northern Illinois State Teachers College in DeKalb (now Northern Illinois University) for a math professor. His father took that job, eventually became chairman of the mathematics department, and ultimately retired from that position.

The move to Illinois from Portland, which occurred in about 1927, was made in a Star sedan, which was about the size of a Model T Ford. The car was plagued with breakdowns and eventually the family finished the trip to DeKalb on a train they boarded in Rock Springs, Wyoming, after the car expired.

Doc’s oldest sibling, Elisabeth, is deceased, but two of his siblings survive. His brother, Bruce Storm, became an Associate Dean at the University of Southern California in the School of Business and is now retired. A younger sister, Barbara Jean, lives in Montana with her husband, Ken Jolley.

Doc has three children from his first marriage to Carol Offner: Robert Haley Storm born 19 December 1946, Ellen Christine Storm born 20 March 1949, and David Bruce Storm born 12 November 1953. A second marriage to Marlene Christensen produced three more children: Susan Kay born 8 July 1953, Marjorie Jane born 6 November 1961, and Michael Burns born 13 June 1963. Two of his offspring earned degrees in the life sciences: (Bob Haley in Zoology at University of Illinois and Marjorie Jane in Horticulture at Oregon State University). He has three grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Doc has been married to Patricia (Patty) Petzel since July 2000. Patty earned a degree in Biology from OSU and is a lab preparator at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Oregon. The couple resides in Corvallis where Doc is Emeritus Professor of Zoology at OSU.

As a youth growing up in DeKalb, Illinois, Doc spent several summers working with corn researchers, helping with breeding experiments in the field plots. He also worked at various jobs for the local canning factory, hoeing beans, loading pea vines on a wagon, sorting sweet corn, and other tasks associated with that business. For several years he maintained a paper route, delivering papers after school hours; because of this, he was never able to go out for sports but has maintained a deep interest in them and is a loyal fan of the Oregon State teams. After graduating from high school in 1935, Doc enrolled at what is now Northern Illinois University, where he received his Bachelor’s Degree in Biological Sciences. While in college, he worked weekends for a grocery delivery and moving business. In the fall of 1939, he took the train to Corvallis, Oregon, where he enrolled as a graduate student at Oregon State Agricultural College (now OSU).

As a five-year-old in Canada, his family lived on a ranch near the little town of Dalemead. Across the road from the Storm ranch was another ranch, occupied by a family with twin children, a boy and a girl. Young Bob became fast friends with the boy, and during one of their forays over the ranch landscape, they uncovered an adult toad of unknown species that his friend bombarded with dirt clods. This upset Bob but it was probably his first herpetological sighting. He also recalls seeing other species of wildlife on the ranch: a Red Fox running ahead of the flames during a field burn, sparrows fighting over bread crumbs, etc. The sightings were always exciting to him.

Growing up in DeKalb, he found a Tiger Salamander (Ambystoma tigrinum) in the basement of a friend’s home. He still claims that it was the only salamander he had seen before he moved to Oregon. During his high school years, he spent much time collecting with a fellow student (Larry “Snake” Keegan) in the suburbs of Chicago. Keegan went on to publish a treatise on venomous animals of the Pacific Region (Keegan and Macfarlane, 1963).

In high school, Doc Storm took a biology course in his second year and credits his teacher, Mr. Oberlin, with getting him really interested in biology. Bob had a moderately religious upbringing, but this course first introduced him to the subject of evolution, and he became increasingly a student of the evolutionary process from that time forward.

When Doc arrived in Corvallis by train in 1939, he intended to major in fisheries and wildlife for his graduate degrees, although there was no graduate program in that field at OSU at that time. Soon after his arrival, he met Dr. Kenneth Gordon who convinced him to major in zoology and minor in fisheries and wildlife. There were no paid

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