Professor George William Benz died from heart complications on the evening of Sunday 9 February 2015 at the age of 61 at his home in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, U.S.A. One is lucky to know a person who has a big mind and a big heart. George was that person. For students and colleagues that he trained and collaborated with, George was as if a big brother, little brother, best friend, father, or combination of those depending on the situation. As demonstrated by his fierce loyalty to, and reverence for, his advisors and mentors, I believe he considered himself as if a son to those who trained him. He dedicated much of his life to advocating for his students and helping others succeed; swelling with pride for others’ successes.

George’s research interests were broad, but he especially loved the siphonostomatoid copepods that infect the skin, gill, and “snouts” of elasmobranchs. While becoming established as an authority on that group, he also became expert on fish diseases for the public aquarium industry, freshwater aquatic conservation issues in the southeastern United States, and Arctic biology via studies of sleeper sharks and their polar ecosystem. He built a research institute from the ground up, and, although he became a professor late in life, throughout his career he maintained productive professional collaborations with university faculty and their students as well as state and federal aquatic biologists. George and coauthors proposed a new family and 5 genera as well as described 17 new species; among them copepods, pentastomes, monogenoids, and leeches. In addition to publishing 76 peer-reviewed articles, 12 book chapters and proceedings, a book, and numerous book reviews and critical comments, George was a potent spokesperson for parasitology, aquatic conservation, and marine biology; his investigations being featured on television (National Geographic Channel, British Broadcasting Channel, Discovery Channel) as well as in print media (National Geographic, Discover, Highlights for Children, Der Spiegel). In addition to being a professor and distinguished researcher at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), he was a research associate and adjunct faculty with the National Marine Fisheries Service (Narragansett, Rhode Island), Mote Marine Laboratory (Sarasota, Florida), Tennessee Aquarium (Chattanooga, Tennessee), Warnell School of Forest Resources (University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia), and the School of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Aquatic Sciences (Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama).

George was a natural-born mentor, and, wherever he was, always created space and time for introducing students to the methods and philosophies of science. He believed, “everyone deserves an at bat,” i.e., a chance to be a productive worker given the appropriate initial training, feedback, and access. He went out of his way to give opportunities to eager students as well as second and third chances to those who stumbled. He chaired 7 graduate committees and served as a committee member for numerous other graduate students at MTSU, the University of Connecticut, the University of Georgia, Saint Mary’s University, the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, and the