
An Appreciation

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On 25 February 2007, our mentor, colleague, and great friend, Melbourne Romaine Carriker died at Lewes, Delaware. It was his ninety-second birthday. He was surrounded by his children and grandchildren.

Mel's life was as eventful and full as his scientific career. He was born 25 February 1915 to Melbourne Armstrong Carriker, Jr. and Myrtle Carmella Carriker on the family coffee plantation, Vista Nieve, near Santa Marta, Colombia. Mel detailed his boyhood experiences on the plantation in his memoir Vista Nieve (Carriker 2000). In 1925, at the age of ten, Mel participated in his first biological expedition accompanying his father, a world-class ornithologist and entomologist, to the eastern slope of the Andes.

The plantation was sold in 1927. After the sale, the family moved to Tom's River, New Jersey, and Mel's father became a curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP). Mel attended the public schools and graduated from high school in 1934. In 1934 and early 1935, Mel and his father returned to the Andes in Bolivia on another ornithological expedition (Carriker, Jr. 2006). During the steamship trip, Mel demonstrated his remarkable abilities on the dance floor, exhibiting such skill that other dancers stopped to watch him and his partner. These displays were attributed to lessons provided by Mel's mother in Tom's River (Castillo and Holyoak 2004). During this expedition that Mel contracted malaria.

Mel entered Rutgers University in 1935 and he majored in agricultural research and minored in zoology, graduating with honors and a B.S. in Zoology in 1938. Mel noted, by playing a few minutes in a varsity match, he lettered in water polo. It was Mel's aim to become an ornithologist but in 1938, his undergraduate advisor, Thurlow C. Nelson, offered him a position to study population movements of oyster larvae in Barnegat Bay, New Jersey. In fall 1938, he entered the University of Wisconsin and there earned a Master of Philosophy and, then, a Doctor of Philosophy degree in June 1943. During summers from 1938 through 1941, Mel returned to Great Bay, New Jersey, and in the summer of 1942 he was placed in charge of the Oyster Investigation Laboratory at Bivalve, New Jersey. These experiences launched his research on molluscs. Mel joined the graduate student group of Lowell E. Noland to study Lymnaea stagnalis (Linné, 1758), the snail vector for swimmer's itch in humans. His doctoral dissertation focused on radular and digestive anatomy, physiology, and function of L. stagnalis.

During 1939 at Wisconsin, Mel met Meriel Roosevelt McAllister, known as Scottie. Following graduation from Wisconsin, Mel entered the Naval Officers Training program at Harvard College in June 1943 and emerged an Ensign in the United States Naval Reserve. On 17 October 1943, he and Scottie were married in Richmond, Virginia, at a ceremony officiated by Scottie’s uncle. Mel and Scottie would have four sons: Eric, Bruce, Neal, and Robert. Mel was ordered for further training at Fort Schuyler, New York, followed by training in Miami, Florida. Mel was then ordered to the Aleutian Islands to serve aboard a small patrol craft with a crew of 60 men and 5 officers. Since the Japanese had been absent for several months, there was little to do but make patrols, during which his duties were standing watch and burning obsolete codes. Eventually, he was promoted to Lieutenant (junior grade) and was made executive officer (second-in-command). Between patrols, Mel collected muricid gastropods and their blood sera from the Aleutian waters for shipment. Mel laughed that the seamen thought this behavior was odd but forgave him because he was, after all, an officer, so odd behavior was expected. Mel placed these Alaskan collections in the alcohol-preserved collections at ANSP in the mid-1980s. Eventually his ship was sent to Pearl Harbor for escort duty, including escorting barges filled with pineapples. At the war’s end, Mel was ordered to report for