



Dr. Austin Almond O'Dell Jr.

December 13, 2014

Dr. Austin Almond O'Dell Jr., 81, of Spring, TX was carried into the loving arms of Jesus, his Savior, on December 13, 2014.

Austin was born on November 28, 1933 to Austin Sr. and Marie O'Dell in Houston, TX. He grew up in Olney, TX where his parents owned an International Harvester dealership.

Early on, he showed great promise, and skipped two early grades. He became interested in atomic physics at the age of 10, and entered the University of Texas to study Nuclear Physics at the age of 16. He received his Bachelors Degree with honors in 1954, and a Masters Degree in 1955 from the University of Texas at Austin. His thesis written on the field of coulomb excitation won the Outstanding Research Award. He obtained his PH.D. degree in Nuclear Physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston with a Dissertation on Electron Bremsstrahlung.

By 1965, Dr. O'Dell had written many technical papers in the fields of nuclear and electron physics. He was a member of the American Physical Society, the American Institute of Physics, Sigma Pi Sigma, and Sigma XI.

From 1956 to 1961, Dr. O'Dell was employed part time as a senior physicist at Baird-Atomic, Inc., where he was responsible for the development of nuclear radiation detector systems for medical and bio-physics fields. He also developed a program to analyze radio-activity in public water supplies in case of radioactive fall-out.

After graduation from MIT in 1961, Dr. O'Dell was employed by Boeing Co. in

Seattle, Washington where he worked in the area of high altitude nuclear weapon effects research that in simpler terms was a shield to keep airplanes from falling out the sky if exposed to a nuclear blast. He later worked for Northrup Ventura, where he was responsible for the design and construction of the flash x-ray facility. He also directed research in the areas of nuclear radiation effects on electronic systems, and components using the linear accelerator facilities, the Un-reflected critical reactor assembly, a pulsed “swimming-pool” reactor, and a flash X-ray system. As a member of the experimental physics group, Dr. O’Dell had technical responsibility to the nuclear physics aspects of radiation effects research, the advanced radiation detector research and development, and served as a technical consultant for operation of the Northrop Ventura flash x-ray facility and supported radiation measurement requirements within the experimental physics group at Northrup Ventura. All of this gained by the age of 32.

In 1965, Dr. O’Dell left the aircraft industry to teach and do research at California Lutheran College. He received a full professorship after just one year.

From 1966 to 1972, while Dr. O’Dell was teaching at California Lutheran College, he also was working part time at EG&G as a Scientific Specialist and Research Physicist. There he did experiments with the linear accelerator, studied the effects of X-ray laser systems on nuclear weapon diagnostics, and other functions using Monte-Carlo techniques.

At Mission Research Corp. in Santa Barbara, from 1972 – 1974, Dr. O’Dell worked as a Research Physicist, compiling and maintaining a set of nuclear radiation transport codes, developed computer codes to calculate the high altitude electromagnetic fields due to X-rays emitted from nuclear weapons, and other studies in the field of nuclear weaponry.

Dr. O’Dell was also present at several nuclear weapons tests in Nevada.

From 1974 – 1989 Dr. O’Dell was a research physicist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where he developed detectors for fissionable materials, and among many other achievements, was recognized for his

development of neutron triggered criticality alarm detectors and their installation. The award stated that the technology has since become part of the technology transfer program.

Dr. O'Dell had an impressive resume listing 63 published papers on his various discoveries and developments. While his primary talent was his vast understanding of the area of Nuclear Physics, his primary motivation was keeping America and its citizens safe from the threat faced during the cold war. No doubt his dedication to his country will in some way, continue to protect us from the evil forces in the world.

During his career, he traveled to many countries, and visited many nuclear reactors. He attended International Nuclear Physics meetings in Geneva, Switzerland, and in Israel, where he spoke to the assembly. In the course of his endeavors, he gained a working knowledge of several languages, including Russian and German.

Throughout his career, Dr. O'Dell and family lived in Boston, Massachusetts, Seattle, Washington, Thousand Oaks, California, Santa Barbara, California, and Pleasanton, California.

In addition to his many professional accomplishments, Austin enjoyed many hobbies including acquiring and reading a vast library of books on history, physics, religion, travel, and innumerable other interests. His collection of classical music records and CD's was not just for show, but continually enjoyed, analyzed, and understood. He played both piano and organ, served many years as a church organist and loved exploring the bowels of antique pipe organs. Austin and wife, Virginia, spent many hours in their music room playing duets on their organ and piano. He also had a lovely bass voice and sang in the San Francisco Choral as well as in the Tomball Choral in Texas. Of course, his interests away from work also included security systems, photography, electronics, gardening, travel and history.

Austin married Joyce Hendrix in 1953, while still at the University of Texas. They had two children, Pamela O'Dell Vaziri and Austin A. O'Dell III.

After retiring from Livermore National Laboratory in 1989 due to a severe back injury. Joyce and Austin divorced and he moved to Spring, Texas.

In 1995, Austin married Virginia Duncan (Herren) and added two more children, Jeffrey Herren and Kristin Lester to his immediate family. These last 20 years were spent being involved in his church, his hobbies, and teaching at the North Harris County College and at a private church high school. His dedication to teaching was shown in the many extra hours that he provided to help struggling students, and in several cases, privately tutored college students to prepare for medical school. They enjoyed opera, symphony, and Broadway productions and were involved in the American Guild of Organists and attended many concerts.

On a very personal note, Austin loved his Lord Jesus Christ, and lived his life accordingly. He was a remarkable man full of Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Self Control. His integrity was beyond question. He never met a stranger, treating the waitress at a restaurant with the same respect as a head of state. He never tried to prove how smart or wonderful he was. Which makes the loss of his presence from his family difficult, yet he has gained the most wonderful goal, to be present with his Lord Jesus Christ throughout all eternity and to finally learn the secrets of the universe that he spent his life investigating.

Austin is survived by Joyce O'Dell, Virginia O'Dell, his brother, Bill O'Dell, his children, Pamela O'Dell Vaziri, Austin A O'Dell III, Jeffrey D. Herren, and Kristin D. Lester. He is also survived by his grandchildren, Amir Vaziri, Tahrah Vaziri, Megan Herren, Jacob Herren, Matthew Lester, and Andrew Lester.

Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. Austin Almond O'Dell Jr.*

July 20, 2022 at 05:14 PM



“ *Rest in peace, Austin. Lovingly, Joyce*

Joyce O'Dell - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM



“ *One of our favorite memories is that Austin always managed to change the language on our computer....to Russian, Italian....., German etc. And I had to figure out how to change it back to English.*

June Gladden - August 08, 2018 at 12:00 AM