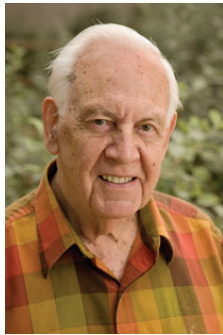


OBITUARY

Peter Andrew Sturrock 1924-2024: Founder of the Society for Scientific Exploration

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SSE President (2010-2022)



**PETER STURROCK
1924-2024**

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20243609>

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Peter Sturrock, founding President of the SSE, passed away peacefully in his home, surrounded by his friends and family, on August 12, 2024, at the age of 100. Peter was a leader among those rare scientists who made major contributions to both conventional and non-conventional science. On the conventional side, Sturrock was known worldwide for his profound contributions to the fields of astrophysics, plasma physics, and solar research. He continued that work until the very end of his life as a distinguished physicist and emeritus professor at Stanford University.

On the less conventional side, Peter, along with peers such as the late Bob Jahn, was among the visionary founders of the SSE. In 1981, they called for a new, generalist society that could function as a magnet for scientists and researchers who were doing rigorous scholarly work in areas we now label as anomalous. These early founders pushed back against the balkanization of knowledge acquisition, which prohibited scholars from veering too far from orthodoxy. Peter and the founders recognized that without a means to network and share ideas, little progress could be made in areas shunned by traditional fields. So, the Society for Scientific Exploration was born to sponsor regular conferences, and the Journal of Scientific Exploration was soon after founded as a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

We wouldn't be here without Peter.

A simple recitation of his many accomplishments, however impressive, doesn't grasp the profound influence he had on generations of scholars, both conventional and not-so-conventional. Some personal anecdotes: I first met Peter in 1999 while attending my first SSE conference. After giving a presentation to the group of luminaries assembled, and having no history with them, I was somewhat uncertain what to expect. Soon after I finished, both Peter (and Bob Jahn) approached me with nothing but encouragement and inquired what they could do to help.

That offer never wavered over the quarter century I knew Peter. When I was in California, we'd try to meet at a restaurant or at his home in Palo Alto. Sometimes, he'd already assembled a group of people who were interested in providing various types of support for me. I would find myself, with his encouragement, giving a spontaneous presentation of some recent work. He obviously took pleasure in being a magnet for scholarly discussions.

When we were at an SSE conference in the US or Europe, we'd try to spend some time in private conversation, catching up with whatever we were working on. I'd be interested in his recent thoughts on UAPs, or the Shakespeare authorship question, or his conventional research on dark matter or neutrinos or whatever. While excited about his ongoing research, he was equally interested in whatever I was working on.

I remember sharing a meal with him soon after he published a book applying Bayes-



ian statistics to the Shakespeare authorship question. He told me that he sent copies to all the members of the English department at Stanford and had not received a single response. When I expressed surprise, he said that he was not, as it was simply an illustration of the response he'd come to expect from most fellow academics. He dismissed reactions like this to academics generally lacking courage and not wanting to stray from orthodoxy.

Peter Sturrock was not lacking in the courage department. He believed, clear-eyed, that so long as rigorous methods and data analysis were used, we need to follow the research wherever it leads. If data points to some phe-

nomenon being considered anomalous, it doesn't mean that it's wrong. It simply might be providing us an opportunity to re-think how the world works. Maybe, maybe not. But wouldn't it be interesting to find out? Could it be more exciting than to challenge a deeply held belief?

That's what Peter embodied. Endless curiosity, coupled with the courage to discover and challenge.

I last talked to him in a zoom call a couple of months before he died. His eyes had the same twinkle; his curiosity was boundless; his offers to help undiminished.

That's what he modeled for us. And we are all in his debt.