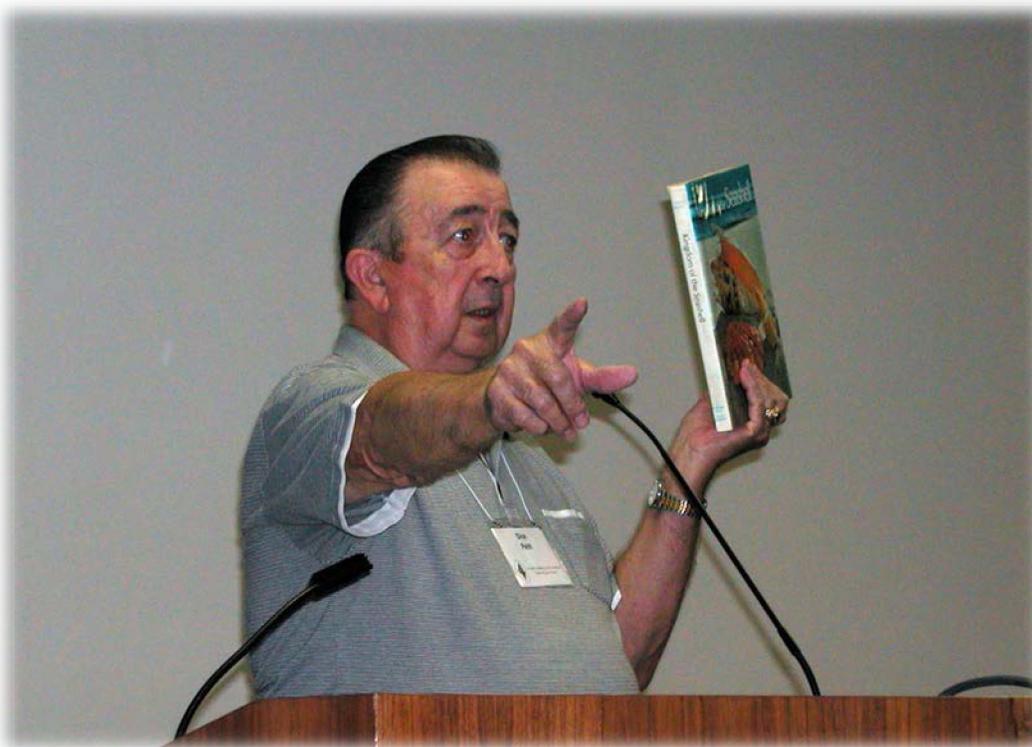


## CONCHOLOGIA GRATISSIMA: REMEMBERING DICK PETIT



*Richard E. Petit, the editor-in-chief of this journal, died on New Year's Eve, 2013. His scientific contributions will be compiled elsewhere, but in keeping with a European tradition that he admired, Dick's friends here present their memories of him.*

*There would be more pictures, but Dick hated being photographed.*

**I** t is difficult to remember when I first met Dick Petit. He has been a presence in American Malacology ever since I remem-

ber. My first contact with him was many years ago, through the mail. At the time, I was a high school student and a shell collector, Dick a new dealer in specimen shells, the "Successor to John Q. Burch". We likely met at a meeting of the American Malacological Union, probably in Newark, Delaware in 1973. As I entered graduate school, it occurred to me that maintaining a personal shell collection would become a conflict of interest, but a library of shell books would be a lifelong asset. By then Dick had become an eminent dealer in antiquarian shell

books. Dick's growing interest in Cancellariidae overlapped with my interest in Neogastropods, so we began to collaborate. Our first paper appeared in 1982, one of 26 we would co-author over the years. Our most recent one was published on the day before he died.

Over the years, friendships developed; Dick and I, both native South Carolinians and members of the Tennessee Squire Association, Liz and my late wife Julia, both expats from the UK. We would meet at AMU meetings. North Myrtle Beach became a favorite stop en route to our family vacations on Kiawah Island. Dick and I would spend the day talking about rare shell books and discussing projects and publications, Liz and the girls would go off to do whatever it is that women do. It usually involved a mall. In time they became "Uncle Dick" and "Aunt Liz" to our daughters.

Many of my favorite memories involved international travel, to the various venues for the UNITAS MALACOLOGICA meetings. Attending the Military Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle, and making heroic efforts at sampling an endless variety of single malts, Dick's comment upon encountering the many kilted bagpipers was: "These fellows only know two songs. The one that's 'Amazing Grace' and the one that isn't."

Following the meeting in Tübingen, we visited museums in Basel and Paris. Dick's instructions to Liz for booking a hotel in Paris were "Find a place that has Jack Daniels in the hotel bar". Most memorable was the meeting in Vienna, when "Aunt Liz" took my daughters on adventures throughout Vienna, Prague and Budapest, while Dick and I attended the meetings.

Dick and I shared many interests, ranging from cancellariid systematics to rare books, yet there were many other topics to which he turned his attention, among them Malacology, Paleontology, the history of natural history and

nomenclatural issues, as well as Japanese malacological literature and cartoons. Dick was exceptionally productive, especially in retirement, and managed to publish over 140 papers with more than 40 co-authors. Above all, he was a man who had very clear ideas of how things ought to be, was very precise, and paid a great deal of attention to details.

He was also very generous with his time and expertise, and would gladly spend hours researching obscure references and arcane ephemera for just about anyone who asked.

He was an inspiration. I am grateful to have known him.

Jerry Harasewych



I first met "Uncle Dick" at the AMU meeting in New Orleans in 1982, the summer before I started graduate school. Dick loved to encourage students and as a budding bibliophile, I fit right into his coterie. Soon he had me hooked on the hard stuff. I visited Liz and Dick in the summer of 1984 and returned with an almost complete *Journal de Conchyliologie*, Korobkov (1955), which Dick advised was an underappreciated rarity, and a few other choice tidbits. He let me run a tab and wasn't ruffled when it took me four months to complete restitution.

Ever after it was a pleasure to stop in at North Myrtle Beach, where a visit to the shed promised delight rather than punishment. A quiet morning breakfast chatting with Liz and reading the comics would start the day right. Then came the retreat to the study to discuss malacological conundra, with breaks for only three things: the call of nature, the shed (where the sales stock was secreted away from the library), and leisurely meals at local restaurants where the staff knew not to bother Dick with salad.

For many years Dick Petit anchored AMU auctions, which were always a highlight of the meeting. It must have been Dick who started the tradition of checking an R. T. Abbott book for a signature and declaring it of greater value unsigned. He liked the auction to move briskly and would give the audience a crestfallen look if no one responded to a nominal opening bid. He'd take a sip of his "medicine", then deliver a few words to alert prospective bidders to their lack of perspicacity. When the item eventually sold, usually for considerably more than the opening bid, he might growl "you could've saved us some time". To avoid such delays, Dick aimed a certain tilt of the head and cock of the eyebrow at a particular bidder he thought might start an item off. He was signaling "this item is worth your while at this price" and those who cottoned on were glad to help out.

Dick tracked facts relentlessly, writing to librarians and archivists all over world to find the critical publication or letter. When he phoned to pose his latest question, or provide an answer to yours, he invariably first made sure that he was "not calling at a bad time". As a project neared completion, his pace increased, with messages requesting a return call escalating from "no hurry" to "at your earliest convenience". Collaborations with Dick were always stimulating: he had strong opinions, so if you wanted something changed on a joint manuscript, your argument had to be in order. Yet he was also flexible: when our Ryckholt manuscript evolved from a short note to a more extensive treatment as I kept funneling facts to him, he graciously allowed me to become first author, knowing that would be important when I started applying for jobs.



*With Gary Rosenberg in Dick's library*

I was pleased and honored that he and Liz made the trek from South Carolina to attend the AMS/COA meeting in Cherry Hill, New Jersey in 2012. One of the dozen items he brought with him for the Academy's library was the copy of Ryckholt's *Mélanges Paléontologiques* that had started our collaboration many years before. I've never met Dick's like for the combination of hospitality, generosity, good-humor, and erudition.

Gary Rosenberg



### Dick Petit

Scarcely a day passes when I don't give some thought to this learned and wise gentleman. Sometimes it'll be a sticky nomenclatorial issue or a bibliographic conundrum in need of resolution, at others a simple happy reflection on the gracious hospitality and conviviality Dick and Liz exuded. Memories of such pleasures and reliances are vivid and tenacious. For me the man was a lodestar in an often chaotic landscape, a crafty catalyst of clear and constructive thought who possessed a knack for prophesy of what needed doing and was doable. Certainly no stranger to didactics, he nonetheless made a greater mark on me as a mentee through the products of his research and analysis – Dick taught by example.

I recall my first interaction with this luminary. It was a simple exchange in 1970, during his somewhat brief excursion into specimen shell mercantilism. Per my expressed wish, he sent me a sinistral *Volema cochlidium* (Neogastropoda: Melongenidae). It was the second mutant reverse-coiled gastropod species in my collection, thus achieving statistical stature. I expressed great satisfaction, and shortly he inquired as to whether this acquisition reflected a focused interest in such shells. I think he sensed there was a spark of passion in need of fueling.

My positive response led to 44 years of dialogue, punctuated by the provision, directly or otherwise, of dozens of other similarly perverse gastropods as well as relevant references, usually in hardcopy and without charge. This might be interpreted as a clever marketing strategy, but those of us who knew Dick learned quickly that he couldn't claim to be pecuniary – at least in the malacological realm. Later, he began to urge me to share my observations related to this topical collection, and, in time, I've complied. The assortment of curiosities he helped foster currently contains 164 species and is presented at

<http://www.jaxshells.org/reverse.htm>.

By 1980 I'd gotten deeply involved with the marine shells of my adoptive home, northeastern Florida, and he sparked another enterprise. "Why don't you publish?" "We're in need of this information" "When will the book be out?" "Not yet?" Despite my rather steadfast reticence and now legendary dilatory progress, his abiding counsel and often subtle entreaties helped reify an opus on the subject after the passage of two decades.

That was his style. Dick has left us a corpus of nonpareil published works with enduring impact, yet there may be no telling the extent to which his encouragement, counsel, support, and foresight carried many others of us to heights otherwise thought unattainable. Knowing this Southern Gentleman has been the one of the greatest privileges – and strokes of good luck – in my life.

Harry Lee



### Memories of Dick

I first met Dick at the then-called AMU, in 1979 in Wilmington, North Carolina, and again when I was the newly elected Treasurer of the

organization in the early 1980s, and Dick was on the council as the up-and-coming President. I would later help him with all the events and activities for his meeting in Charleston after he was elected as President.

His fame in those days, besides his contributions to the sciences, and one that continued on for many more years, was as the Auctioneer for the yearly meetings. I was invited by him to be his personal assistant, a position I held for so many years. Besides handing him the next item to be auctioned, I was a spotter for those bidding in the audience, and kept the financial records of the proceeds of the event. But, my most favorite job was being in charge of the bottle of Jack Daniels, which I guarded for dear life at the beginning of these auctions. Dick had informed me that since we were now one happy family, his dear wife Liz included in this clan, I was the keeper of the bottle, and that nothing could interfere with that highest position.

As the auction went on, Dick's throat would become dry, and he would turn to me, with a sheepish grin on his face, and say: "Uncle Dickie needs his medicine". It was then my privilege to pour him some of the golden liquid into his glass, and then he would proceed with the bidding. After a few more items were sold, once again, "Uncle Dickie needed more medicine", and so it went. How long the auctions went decided how full or empty the bottle of Jack was. It was never quite empty.

When the auctions were over, we all would go out for something to eat and recap the evening's events. If the proceeds were not to Dick's liking, he would blame me for not giving him enough "medicine", but if we did very well, I was praised as being the best nurse ever.

Years later, at the meeting in Key West, Liz and I were shopping for Tee shirts and I found one that I purchased for him. Its sentiment was:

"I don't have a drinking problem, I drink, I drink some more, I fall down, I get up, No Problem". It was a bright red shirt, and Dick wore that to the auctions over the next several years.

Seeing Dick and Liz at the Philadelphia AMS/COA meeting was so wonderful. It had been several years since we all were together, even though we did keep in touch. His humor and love of life had not diminished, and it was my joy to be one of his many friends.

Anne Joffe



### Recollections of Dick

It was around 20 years ago that I first got word of Dick's business of selling mollusca and earth sciences books, and his lists soon became a favorite of mine. Those of us who were trying to build up a working library know how difficult that is to do without large amounts of disposable funds. I had then primarily three sources for those kinds of books, and Dick, along with Wheldon & Wesley, would also give advice and make suggestions as to what was worth acquiring, which I found very useful. My third source then was John Sinkankas of Sinkankas Books, and sadly all three are now no longer with us.

My first visit to his house still stands in my mind. We had driven down from New Jersey, where I was working at the time, and were invited to spend the weekend with Dick and his wife at their home. Well, traffic delayed our arrival and when we got there Dick, after quick introductions, said he had booked a restaurant just over the border in North Carolina. We would have to leave at once, so there was unfortunately no time for a cocktail at home. However not to worry, we could enjoy one in the car on the way there! So all four of us re-

paired to his giant auto (I think it was a Cadillac), each with a large, strong highball in our hands, and he sped up the country roads at night to the restaurant. Of course we had another once we got there! I must say there seemed to be absolutely no impairment in Dick's abilities throughout the evening.

It was quite an experience back in his house, he as usual sitting behind his high desk, and me looking at his Aladdin's Cave of rarities and swapping stories of the ones that got away! On that first visit he first broached the subject of passing on the business, which I eventually took over. I found it hard to believe that in this day and age he still essentially kept all his business and customer information as hand-written notes on 3x5 inch index cards, and he was very successful at it.

Both he and Liz were marvelous hosts throughout the weekend but as us British people say, you would have to "watch your Ps and Qs" and stay sharp when talking to Dick; mispronounce a name (in my case it was d'Orbigny!) and he would correct you like a schoolteacher, and as for dates of publications and the like his memory was encyclopedic.

I had one second visit some years later when I picked up his stock and he apologized profusely for the poor selection he was handing over! His 'poor' stock would have made most collectors extremely happy! Since that time we had kept in occasional contact and I have had the benefit of what he thought an item might be worth.

Chris Garvie



My introduction to the scholarly work of Dick Petit came with my 1969 purchase of Olsson and Petit, 1964, *Some Neogene Mollusca from Flor-*

*ida and the Carolinas*. Come 1973-76, Sarah and I were graduate students at the University of South Carolina, busily immersing ourselves in Coastal Plain paleontology and stratigraphy, an effort which frequently brought us to the Myrtle Beach area. I contacted Dick, who invited us to a home already resplendent with the beginnings of his magnificent library.

Dick was a very successful real estate and insurance broker who discovered the incredible riches of the Plio-Pleistocene Waccamaw molluscan fauna by collecting the Windy Hill Airport pits near Myrtle Beach. To identify the species, he turned to Axel Olsson, Druid Wilson, Bill Clench, Tucker Abbott and Harold and Emily Vokes, among others. To build his personal library, Dick bought entire libraries, beginning with that of famed geologist, C. Wythe Cooke. Dick kept the works he needed, and became a book dealer, selling the remainder. We benefitted from Petit purchases from the 1970s until he retired from sales early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Dick's shipments of literature always came with a colorful collection of commemorative stamps, sometimes covering half or more of the face of the package. When I mentioned my appreciation for this, he said that some of his customers saved the entire wrapper for stamp collections. Dick had a quick wit, a great sense of humor, and a photographic memory. He devoured the Code of Zoological Nomenclature, and could immediately turn to sections relevant to my studies. He read French fluently, and had a working knowledge of many languages. Knowing our interests, he would alert me to available works benefiting our studies.

Our 1973 visit found Dick already committed to the Family Cancellaridae. He showed us extensive collections of fossil and Recent cancellarids on which he was working, including the

silicified Eocene *Extractrix* species published just this year. To obtain Recent cancellarids, Dick found sources more productive at the wholesale level, so he bought a shell dealership, and for a time was an active shell dealer.

For visitors at the Petit home, Liz was always the ultimate in a gracious hostess. On one of many visits, I was invited to stay for a hot dog lunch featuring Jack Daniels Mustard. Liz observed that Dick liked any product that had the Jack Daniels label.

Our family had the privilege of counting Dick and Liz as friends for forty-one years. Over that time we could always call on him for resolution of knotty or obscure problems in systematics, and frequently did so. We, in turn, were able to share our cancellarid discoveries with him, co-authoring *Zeadmete atlantica* Petit, Campbell and Campbell, 2010.

Dick was particularly supportive of my 1993 monograph of the Virginia Pliocene molluscs, and our more recent work on the Recent Chamidae of Eastern North America. During the latter effort, Dick shared that he especially enjoyed such requests, sharing his library as a service to the field.

Lyle Campbell



### Dick Petit

I met Dick during the American Malacological Union Symposium in New Orleans in 1982, to which I was asked to bring a display of Honduras shells. No sooner had I finished setting it up when Dick showed up and introduced himself.

I was a rather shy person in 1982, but I remember that Dick's frank countenance and unpretentious manners made me feel like I had just met a long-lost friend. We talked about the shells in display, my Honduras experiences, his

work on Cancellariidae, and generalities that led me to indicate my predilection for Epitoniidae. At home some weeks later, I received an unexpected package from Dick containing a beautiful *Sthenorytis pernobilis* which, for those who need translation from the Wentletrapien language, means "Holy Grail!" And this was free, gratis. What an introduction!

The years ahead were no different. With all of his assiduous research and publication, where did he find time to answer the many question I had for him, to keep me informed of recent literature that I should have, or better yet, to write to authors asking them to send me reprints that he thought I would need. And I don't dare mentioning the many "inches" of reprints and rare books that he let me have at bargain prices. No, I won't mention that.

The last item that Dick sent me (free, gratis) was a very old map of Cuba. It was the map that I used to see as a child in ESSO gas stations all over Cuba. This was the time when we were discussing the McGinty papers, particularly Paul's "Shell collecting Cuba." I was not sure I would be able to handle the editing because I was going through a rather traumatic experience with the illness of a dear person, and I explained the situation to him in more details than I can say here. His reply was to that time was of no concern, and that my problems made his seem less significant.

I read this message the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, 2013. I read of his passing the next day. What an introduction; what a *finis*.

Emilio F. García



### Cooperating with Dick Petit

In the late 1990s I was working on a paper treating the famous and classical Danish Paleocene

fauna from Copenhagen and, to my big surprise, I received an e-mail from Richard E. Petit in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Of course I knew some papers by Dick, but I had never been in contact with him. Dick had found me on the web site of the Geological Institute, the University of Aarhus, Denmark and noted that I was studying Cancellariidae from the Paleocene of Denmark and soon he was helping me to solve taxonomic problems. I got the study of the Copenhagen Paleocene fauna published (Schnetler, 2001) and Dick's help was very valuable. We maintained our contact and a few years later I proposed him that we together revise the Cancellariidae from the classical Danish Paleocene locality Faxø Quarry. Our paper was published in 2006 and we established five new species and continued to be in contact.

A few years later we continued our work together, as we both had noted the many undescribed species from the Paleocene of Nuussuaq, West Greenland, including several species of Dick's beloved family the Cancellariidae. We exchanged lots of e-mails, and material was also exchanged and finally we could publish our paper in 2010. We established the new genus *Beuaphera* Schnetler & Petit, 2010, named in honour of another great palaeontologist, Dr. A. G. Beu, New Zealand, and we in all established 17 new species, 16 of them Cancellariidae and one Buccinidae, from this remarkable and highly diverse fauna from West Greenland.

Dick worked very carefully with his papers and when we established the species *Beuaphera nuussuaqensis* after the type locality, he was very interested in the correct pronouncing of the Greenlandish name Nuussuaq. We did not, however, succeed in finding it!

It was a great pleasure to work together with Dick and benefit from his enormous knowledge of taxonomy and literature and fur-

thermore, we had so many fruitful discussions. He was always ready with help and support any time I needed it. Most of all, he taught me that you should work hard for your projects, be helpful and careful and never give up.

I never met Dick in person, but our contact by mail was very warm and I feel that I have lost a dear and helpful friend.

Ingemann Schnetler



### My friend Dick

I could always tell when Dick Petit was in a good mood. I'd pick up the ringing phone and he'd greet me with "Deacon Callomon! Didn't see you in church this week!"

I first met Dick and Liz in Japan, where my boss had assigned me to look after them during their stay. I had been tipped off about Dick's fondness for Jack Daniels, and a fifth stood ready on the table in their hotel suite. Entering the room, Dick spied it, turned to me with a big grin and boomed "You and I are going to get along just FINE!"

And so we did, collaborating on several publications over eighteen years or so and regularly meeting up to set the world to rights. Dick's enormous intellectual energy persisted undimmed throughout his life, despite an unshakeable contempt for vegetables, non-alcoholic beverages and any form of exercise more strenuous than golf. He was the soul of kindness to his many friends, forgiving our manifold trespasses with the wave of a hand. His foes, however, though few in number, were damned for all time with the precise terminology and economical grammar acquired during his days in military command.

Dick liked nothing more than pulling apart knotty legacies, and among his many works we

have him to thank for reliable guides to the miasmas left behind by Reeve, Gray and (Hallelujah!) the three George B. Sowerbys. As a sideline to our day jobs, he and I tackled some of Habe's work, and tinkered for years with Kira's vital but little-known journal the *Yume-Hamaguri*.

Taxonomical pedantry aside, Dick and I shared a fondness for blue jokes<sup>1</sup> and newspaper cartoons. He particularly liked Walt Kelly and the flowery prose of his bumptious southern orators, and we also agreed on more modern strips like Pastis's *Pearls Before Swine*. I never dared tell him I'm a Doonesbury fan, though, an admission for which I now fear he will reach out of the grave to bring me down a peg.

In 2012 there was a joint meeting of the AMS and COA in New Jersey. This was enough to drag Dick out of his chair and into his Cadillac, and abandoning caution he and Liz made the ten-hour run straight through. Alerted to his early arrival, I drove down to the hotel to find him in the bar - where else? - holding court, surrounded by his friends and protégés, the Great and Good of American Malacology, and a number of young'uns and overseas visitors who knew of the legend and had come to see for themselves. It is a scene I treasure, a fitting memory of a man who liked nothing more than to help others do good work, regardless of who they were.

Those happy phone calls always ended with Dick asking "Is there anything I can do for you?" It's something I try to say to others whenever I can these days.

Paul Callomon

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<sup>1</sup> Dick told me possibly the funniest joke I've ever heard, which sadly cannot be reproduced in this respectable publication. Relayed to an artist friend of mine, it inspired an entire painting.

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