

## OBITUARY STUART POTTASCH

16 January 1932 – 4 April 2018

Following a long illness, Prof. Stuart Pottasch died in Groningen on 4 April 2018. Stuart was Professor Emeritus at the Kapteyn Institute of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, where he had been a professor since 1963. Stuart served as chairman of the Department of Astronomy in Groningen from 1969 until 1982, and with the coming of the space research group (SRON) he oversaw a major expansion of the research effort in astronomy during his tenure as chairman. Among his other achievements, Stuart was editor-in-chief of the Bulletin of the Astronomical Institutes of the Netherlands (1963-1969), an editor of the European journal of Astronomy and Astrophysics from its founding (1969-1976), editor of the Letters edition of that journal (1976-1998) and an editor of Astronomy and Astrophysics Reviews (1990-1999). In these functions he played a major role in the integration of the joint European astronomical research community. Over his career, Stuart published roughly 400 papers that received more than ten thousand citations and wrote a highly regarded major textbook on the subject of planetary nebulae, his primary research interest. He supervised the successful dissertation work of 22 PhD students.

Stuart was born in New York City on 16 January 1932 to Jewish immigrants. He received his bachelors degree in Engineering Physics from Cornell University in 1954 and his masters from Harvard in 1957 after spending a year in Leiden in 1955. He was awarded his PhD from the University of Colorado in 1958 for his dissertation entitled "The Novae Outburst" carried out under the supervision of R.N. Thomas. As was typical for young astrophysicists then (and now), he spent several peripatetic years at various institutes: the National Bureau of Standards (U.S.), the Observatoire de Meudon, Princeton University and the Institute for Advanced Study, and Indiana University. During these years he formed a number of lasting contacts, one of the most notable examples being with Jean-Louis Steinberg in Meudon. In 1963 Adriaan Blaauw, who was revamping the old Kapteyn Institute in Groningen, offered Stuart the position of professor of astrophysics, and here he remained.

Stuart was a traditional astrophysicist in the style of Henry Norris Russell and Lyman Spitzer. He dealt with known problems of atomic physics and radiative processes in astronomical environments – the interstellar medium and diffuse nebulae. Stuart was interested in real problems that he felt he could solve and less in the more speculative aspects of modern theoretical astrophysics.

His many students have included Harm Habing, Klaas de Boer, Jacqueline van Gorkom, Roel Gathier, Peter Roelfsema, Albert Zijlstra, Rob Assendorp, Rene Laureijs, Griet van der Steene and Rene Oudmaijer. Stuart's style of supervision was relaxed; he did not closely monitor or direct the research of students but encouraged a great deal of independence. This style agreed with some and not with others, but this was Stuart. To those meeting him for the first time, he often seemed somewhat introverted and remote, but, in fact, being underestimated was his management tactic, as a number of colleagues later discovered.

In connection with his work, Stuart traveled extensively, in particular to India and China where he established numerous collaborations leading to a multi-cultural flow of students to Groningen.

Stuart was not only a very busy and successful astrophysicist, he also had several consuming hobbies. He had one of the largest collections of cacti in the Netherlands; tourists came from afar to visit his greenhouses. He collected not only exotic plants but also exotic tropical birds. He kept and bred parrots of numerous and various species - amazons, grays, macaws, cockatoos, and love birds to name a few. He must have had a very deep and abiding interest in these creatures which, as anyone knows who has had just one, are not the easiest pets.

Stuart met his first wife, Anna Maria, during his first visit to Leiden. They had a daughter and two sons. After Anna Marie's death in 1989, Stuart remarried Greet. Together they began a new life in a different village, Tolbert, and a different home, a farm house intentionally chosen for its isolation to accommodate his lively birds. Greet was with him as he passed away on the evening of 4 April 2018.

Robert Sanders