

**DEL WENIGER (1923-1999),**  
REMARKABLE TEACHER AND NATURALIST

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In 1960, Del Weniger joined the faculty of Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, Texas.

He was later to become the chairman of the Biology Department. After teaching general biology and ecology for nearly forty years, Del retired from O.L.L. in 1988 as Professor Emeritus.

Although born in Kingman, Kansas, Del thought of himself as an adopted Texan. Appropriately so, since he researched the plants and animals of the state for half a century, this resulting in numerous published articles, and his first two books, *Cacti of the Southwest* and *Cacti of Texas and Adjacent States*. The first book received, in 1970, Theta Sigma Phi's "Author of the Year's Best Book By A Texas Publisher" award, as well as accolades from numerous organizations and reviewers. *Echinocereus wenigeri*, a Texas cactus was named for him.

His first two books were followed by *Explorers Texas*, Vol. I, which the Texas Historical Commission judged to be the "Best Historical Publication of 1984." Vol. II of the series soon followed. Volumes III and IV were in progress at the time of Del's death. He also co-authored the book, *San Antonio in the Eighteenth Century*, which received the Texas Historical Commission's 1978 "Official Texas Award For The Best Publication of the Year in Local or Regional History."

Del spent many hours researching whatever was written down by the early explorers and pioneers of Texas. His family and friends remember the great pleasure he took in finding new journals or letters of early explorers or settlers who recorded what they saw as they traveled Texas. His deep sense of stewardship of the earth and its gifts was evident in his teaching, his lectures, his volunteer work, and his ecological consultation for federal and local agencies. He stressed responsible, respectful use of our natural heritage as he served as a founding member of the San Antonio Botanical Center, and on local, state and regional boards of the Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club.

A thorough-going naturalist with a respect for all forms of life, Del exhibited an educator's affection for those of his students who demonstrated enthusiasm for the study of biology. As a former student I can attest to his effectiveness in teaching both the fundamentals of ecology and the delight of field work associated with such studies. Professor Weniger loved teaching as much as he loved learning and always took extra time for a student's interest or inquiry.

Those of us who were familiar with Del Weniger's dedicated working habits and regular good humor were amazed to learn, upon his death, that he had been living, since birth, with an illness called Eisenmenger Complex, a condition whereby a person is born with only a 3-chambered heart. Medical experts think that, because of the heart having to work so much harder, one's life expectancy is lowered to less than 40 years. Delbert Kenneth Weniger, born May 10, 1923, died at the age of 76 on July 10, 1999.



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