In Memoriam: Bill Kaula

The following was read as Division Chair Stan Peale dedicated the 2000 meeting [1] of the American Astronomical Society Division on Dynamical Astronomy to the memory of Bill Kaula.

As most of you know, our friend and colleague, Bill Kaula, died peacefully a week ago last night after a decade-long battle with cancer that was anything but peaceful. Bill was a member of the original organizing committee for the DDA in 1969, served as a DDA Committeeman from 1971 to 1973, as DDA Vice Chairman from 1974 to 1975 and as Chairman from 1975 to 1976. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to dynamical astronomy, Bill received the Brouwer Award in 1989. As one of the founders of the DDA, after a remarkably productive scientific career in dynamical astronomy, in the dynamics of planetary interiors, and broad aspects of solar system science, and after a lifetime of unselfish service to government agencies, to professional societies, to his university, and most of all to his enumerable friends, it is most appropriate that we dedicate this meeting to remembering Bill.

Bill developed some of the earliest expansions of the Earth's gravitational field using satellite geodesy, and he published a book describing the state of the art of geodesy at that time. After he moved to UCLA in the early sixties, he rapidly expanded his knowledge of planetary science, and he published papers on an incredibly broad range of subjects during his career. These include applications of his geodesy expertise to other terrestrial bodies, and interpreting the gravitational fields of these bodies in terms of interior properties. He also published on tidal evolution, chaotic dynamics, history and stability of planetesimal distributions, the formation of terrestrial planets through accretion, the formation of the solar system, origin of the Moon, comparative planetology including compositional implications, thermal history of terrestrial bodies — especially Venus, and the quest for fast and accurate numerical integration schemes to follow solar system history and evolution. He must have devoured most of the literature in dynamical planetary science and in the physics of the solid solar system bodies, for one could ask him questions on almost any subject and he would understand the material in detail and know who had published what when. We celebrate his career.

Bill's fight with cancer would have driven most of us to all consuming self pity and anger. Yet he remained always cheerful and optimistic. He wore a hat to hide the wounds that would not heal, and proceeded with his life as if nothing were wrong. He remained scientifically active until the very end, having coauthored at least 6 papers last year, and he is a coauthor of a paper at this conference. Ever optimistic, only a month ago, while in the hospital for the last time, he was still intending to come to this meeting. His service to the University also continued until the very end as he was a member of the extremely demanding UCLA Committee on Academic Personnel when he died — fretting a few days before the end that he was not doing his share. We shall miss his energy, enthusiasm and counsel. Let's make this a memorable meeting in memory of Bill Kaula — always interested and always our friend.

Links
[1] https://dda.aas.org/meetings/2000