In Memoriam: Donald M. Baer (1931–2002):
A Man of Intelligence, Integrity,
Courtesy, and Humor

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Donald Baer died suddenly of heart failure at home in Lawrence, Kansas, on Sunday, April 28, 2002, just 2 weeks following a symposium in celebration of his career by over 100 of his students, colleagues, and family. Sadly, he died just 5 weeks before he was to have retired from the University of Kansas.¹ He is survived by his wife, Elsie Pinkston, and his three daughters with his former wife, Ann Marshall Levine. Their daughters are Ruth, Miriam, and Deborah Baer. His brother Robert Baer also survives him.

Don was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on October 25, 1931. His parents were immigrants from Belorussia. They had to work, rather than complete their high-school educations. Their aspirations for their sons included a college education, and they worked hard toward that goal. Don's father was a labor organizer, which required his family to move from town to town. Don said that his father was sometimes beaten. Don himself suffered the abuse of peers because he was Jewish, and because he treasured his schooling and did not hide his academic interests. Nevertheless, Don trained as an elec-

trician's apprentice, and he worked in a steel foundry in Pennsylvania. He described heat so intense in the foundry that he often fainted and was carried outside by fellow workers to be revived and returned to the furnaces. Fortunately, he learned that the University of Chicago granted early admission, and, with the help and support of his parents, he left for Chicago at the end of his junior year in high school.

Don began his college career as a math major, like his brother, but in graduate school Don realized he needed a field of study that reflected his own interests. He considered biology, until he read a fellow student's copy of Keller and Schoenfeld's *Principles of Psychology* (1950). A course with Jack Gewirtz solidified Don's interest in psychology as a natural science, and under Jack's mentorship he earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1957. While he was a student Don worked with Jack on a series of studies on social deprivation as a motivational variable (Gewirtz & Baer, 1958a, 1958b; Gewirtz, Baer, & Roth, 1958).

After receiving his doctorate, Don's first academic appointment was at the University of Washington, in Seattle. There Don worked closely with Sidney Bijou, with whom he coauthored the first books on behavior analysis of child development (Bijou & Baer, 1961, 1965, 1978). When Sid retired, Barbara Etzel, Judi LeBlanc, and Don honored his work with a coedited Festschrift (1977).

Don was recruited in 1965 by Frances Horowitz to help develop the

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¹ To honor Don at his retirement, the Department of Human Development and Family Life set up the Donald M. Baer Faculty Award. To find out more about this award or to contribute, one may contact Edward K. Morris, Chair, Department of Human Development and Family Life, 4001 Dole Human Development Center, University of Kansas, 1000 Sunnyside Avenue, Lawrence, Kansas 66045 (e-mail: ekm@ku.edu).

Department of Human Development and Family Life at the University of Kansas. Frances, Barbara Etzel, Jim Sherman, and Don designed internationally recognized programs in behavior analysis, early childhood education, and developmental psychology (Baer, 1993a). With colleagues Mont Wolf and Todd Risley, Don helped establish the field of applied behavior analysis with the founding of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. Their seminal articles have defined applied behavior analysis since 1968 in an enduring and meaningful manner (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968, 1987). These articles are required reading in behavior analysis courses and they continue to guide our thinking about the nature of our discipline.

During his career, Don published over 200 journal articles, chapters, and books on the behavior analysis of human development.² He and his students conducted some of the earliest empirical research on imitation and language development from a behavioral perspective, with both typically developing children and people with developmental disabilities (Baer, Guess, & Sherman, 1972; Baer, Peterson, & Sherman, 1967; Baer & Sherman, 1964; Garcia, Baer, & Firestone, 1971; Guess, Sailor, & Baer, 1974, 1978; Sherman, Clark, & Kelly, 1977). Other research topics included diverse areas such as stimulus control (Baer & Pinkston, 1997), self-instruction (e.g., Grote, Rosales, Morrison, Royer, & Baer, 1997), and creativity (e.g., Goetz & Baer, 1973). Don and his students published papers on research design (e.g., Parsonson & Baer, 1978), generalization from training (e.g., Stokes & Baer, 1977), and child advocacy (Budd & Baer, 1976).³ All had as their

overall theme the experimental analysis of behavior.

Not surprisingly, Don received many honors during his career. He had been Roy A. Roberts Distinguished Professor of Human Development and Family Life and of Psychology at the University of Kansas since 1975. He was honored by the Don Hake Memorial Award from Division 25 of the American Psychological Association in 1987, for "exemplary contributions to basic behavioral research and its applications." In 1996 he received the Edgar A. Doll Award from Division 33 of the American Psychological Association, for "outstanding contributions in behavioral science on behalf of people with developmental disabilities." The last honor entered into his vita was from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis, for "distinguished service to behavior analysis" in 1997. Don taught as visiting professor in many other countries, including Australia, Brazil, Japan, and Spain. He was scheduled to speak in Poland in June 2002, and again in Brazil in the coming year.

Don was a true intellectual. He had a first-rate liberal arts education, he loved classical music, and he pursued arcane hobbies such as astronomy, chess, and the abstruse technicalities of clockworks and photography. To many he seemed to have been born with Occam's razor in one hand and an unabridged dictionary in the other. Don was a formidable behavioral scientist, but he never deliberately belittled others with his own genius. Although he often questioned the premises of an argument, he was never a gadfly; he was far too courteous. When he asked us to reconsider some basic premise, his style was to nod briefly, tilt his head sideways, and raise his guileless blue

² A more thorough bibliography of Don's work and honors is available from Don's colleague, Edward K. Morris, at the above address.

³ Many readers may be unfamiliar with Don's role in children's advocacy, which was a source of pride for him. Such readers may enjoy "A Tribute to Donald M. Baer: A Children's Advocate in Academic Robes," written by Karen

S. Budd for Division 37 of the American Psychological Association immediately following Don's death. To obtain a copy, contact the author at DePaul University, Department of Psychology, 2219 North Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614 (e-mail: kbudd@wppost.depaul.edu).

eyes to ours in warm invitation to join him in an intellectual investigation. He stated the premises upon which his arguments would be based, and he enlightened us with the intelligence and integrity of his words, many of which found their way into print and many of which did not.

Most of us treasured Don not only for his brilliance and kindness but also for his sense of humor. He had a warm, chuckling, happy laugh that was contagious, and he was certainly not above laughing at himself. At least once, Don's self-effacing style of questioning produced a humorously unexpected result. His daughter Miriam tells a story about Don while he was visiting professor in Australia. In a meat market Don discovered exotic sausages in great variety. He was not sure whether they were sold by the pound or by the link, so he (undoubtedly) tilted his head sideways, raised his guileless blue eyes to the butcher and asked, uncertainly, "How do you sell them?" The butcher paused, studied Don for a moment, then answered in bewilderment, "Well, you give me the money and I give you the sausages."

Don always seemed to have his life in perspective. He often said that his primary motivation was to understand. He wanted to understand behavior, and science offered him the most reliable methodology for that undertaking. He described most of his professional behavior as a mere by-product of that quest. The role of university professor suited Don well, because that profession both allowed and required the quest for understanding as an integral part of the job. Don often expressed gratitude for his profession, which he described as a "privileged position" in our society.

As a professor, Don took his teaching seriously. In describing his fledgling career at the University of Washington, Don reported that he had been miserably disfluent as a lecturer and that he had had to work hard on his presentations. Even during his early years at the University of Kansas,

when he still taught the large undergraduate child psychology class, he often asked his teaching assistants for feedback about the clarity of his lectures. He was not satisfied until he had prepared the best lecture he could deliver. By then, however, his lectures were polished gems. Over 30 years later, one can still vividly remember him at the podium describing the learning experiences that could shape a toddler's pincer grasp so that the child could hold a well-cooked green pea delicately between thumb and index finger without squashing it or dropping it. Although it might be difficult for some to imagine that Don ever had to work hard at presenting an eloquent talk, it is yet another mark of his dedication to intellectual clarity that he became so famously accomplished as a speaker.

Don often contrasted good science and good theater, both of which he enjoyed. Nevertheless, he insisted on their separate functions of understanding and entertaining. Show business had no place in science, and he could be ruthless if he thought a scientist was espousing nonscientific information or failing to qualify claims to knowledge. Furthermore, he was suspicious of scientists who presented themselves or their views in an ostentatious manner. As a behaviorist, he considered the inference of hypothetical constructs to be a case of show business. He once described the positing of such inferences as "laughable games we play when frozen out of experimentability" (personal communication, August 10, 1994).

Although he had served as statistical consultant to the *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* early in his career, Don championed the use of visual inspection of graphically displayed data over statistical analysis of data as the primary means to evaluate the effectiveness of experimental procedures (e.g., Baer, 1993b; Parsonson & Baer, 1986, 1992). His course on experimental design at the University of Kansas was enthralling to many of the hun-

Donald M. Baer, 1931–2002. (photo taken by Claire L. Poulson)

dreds of graduate students who were privileged to take it. He offered fresh insights into design issues. For example, from his mathematics background he argued that the logic of single-subject research design did not require assumptions about prediction from trends in a line graph. Thus, it was more parsimonious to avoid such assumptions. Many of us urged him to write a textbook on experimental design, but he confessed that he simply hated writing books. It is all the more noteworthy,

then, that he coedited a final book with his wife Elsie Pinkston (Professor Emerita of Social Services Administration at the University of Chicago) to honor longtime colleague Barbara Etzel with a Festschrift upon her retirement from the University of Kansas (Baer & Pinkston, 1997). Fittingly, at his retirement celebration, Don himself was presented with a three-volume Festschrift of papers written by his own students and colleagues to honor him.

For many years the door of Don's office bore a plaque that read, "Word Merchant." He wryly understood "word merchant" to be the essence of his job as a professor. People paid money for his books. Students in large lecture classes paid tuition for his words. Graduate students and colleagues traded their words for his. He was much sought after as an editor, an editorial board member,⁴ and a reviewer of manuscripts. He was heavily in demand as a discussant at symposia, adroitly trading words with the rest of us. I do not think we often returned words of value equal to the diamonds of clarity, truth, integrity, courtesy, understanding, and humor that he produced for us. As word merchant, he left us heavily in his debt. And all too soon.

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⁴ Don served on the editorial board of *The Behavior Analyst*, among many other professional journals.

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