In Memoriam

Alfred Viola
July 8, 1928 - May 15, 2020

By Michael P. Filosa

Alfred Viola was a fixture at NESACS Board Meetings when I began my tenure as Nucleus Editor in 2005. He was always a friendly presence and was in charge of the NESACS Continuing Education Subcommittee for many years. He would arrange once or twice a year for a short course of interest to NESACS membership to be held at a convenient location such as Northeastern University where he was an emeritus professor. Those courses would be advertised at no cost in the Nucleus, much to the chagrin of Ad Manager Vince Gale who did not like anybody to get free advertising for an event that was intended to make money.

Al was also a very passionate birder and nature photographer. I remember after one board meeting discussing the camera he had mounted on a “rifle stock” so that he could better track birds and “shoot” them. His wife Joy told me that there were actually three of them made for use by Al and his two nephews..
Al was a much beloved professor at Northeastern University. He was a recent victim of the COVID-19 pandemic and died at the age of 91 in Wayland. Just six months earlier he was interviewed by the Austrian Cultural Center about his life story as a Jewish refugee who escaped Austria at the age of 9 and made a life in the United States. His life story can be found at the Leo Baeck Institute. Listening to the recording is like sitting with Al again.

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Al was born July 8, 1928 in Vienna, Austria. He fled the Nazi regime at the age of nine via the Kindertransport and spent a year in Britain before leaving England with his mother to be reunited with his father in New York City. The family soon moved to Baltimore where employment prospects were better for his father. He pursued higher education at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and Johns Hopkins University. He received his Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from the University of Maryland.

Al originally came to Boston for a Post-doctoral fellowship at Boston University. His position was dependent on funding by the Air Force and ended abruptly when funding was withdrawn. He had to scramble to find an academic job. He began his academic career at Northeastern University in 1957 as a one-year substitute and remained there for 41 years retiring as Professor Emeritus in 1997.

He taught Organic Chemistry at both the undergraduate and graduate level. He was nominated and received Northeastern University’s Excellence in Teaching Award in 1991. His research was in physical organic chemistry and he published 39 papers.

At his retirement party in 1997, his former student, Ann Beaulieu, a senior manager in the Research Department of Rohm and Haas, told the following story:

“I was an A student until I hit organic with AV. I got a 62 on the first exam and a 47 on the second exam. I studied nothing but organic chemistry for the next six weeks and got a 98 on the final. AV’s response was a statement that has guided me throughout my entire career.”

He said, “Now that I have seen what you are capable of doing, I expect no less from you ever again.”

Al also met his wife, Joy, at Northeastern in December 1962 and they married in October 1963. A lifelong birder and wildlife photographer, with a life list in excess of 2300 species, he enjoyed a hobby of nature photography and together with his wife traveled to all seven continents. The photo collection of more than 6000 images amassed by Alfred and his wife was subsequently donated to the University of Georgia Center for Invasive
Species and Ecosystem Health and are available to the public through its website, www.Bugwood.org.

In 1991, Alfred and his wife established the Alfred and Joy Viola Undergraduate Scholarship at Northeastern University for students majoring in chemistry and pharmacy. More than 30 students have since benefited from this scholarship.

Al was a 50-year member of the American Chemical Society and received the Henry A. Hill Award from NESACS in 1996. He is survived by his wife, Joy, several cousins in California, many of his wife’s family members in Minnesota with whom he was close, and several nieces and nephews in Israel, as well as his beloved dogs, Ozzie, a golden retriever and Anna, a black labrador. Internment was at Mount Auburn Cemetery, a favored location for watching the spring warbler migration. Donations in his memory may be made to the Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue, PO Box 808, Hudson, MA or the Sudbury Valley Trustees, 18 Wolbach Road, Sudbury, MA 01778.

| Hudson Bay polar bear (Ursus maritimus) | African Fish Eagle (Haliaeetus vocifer) |
Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis*)

Toco Toucan (*Ramphastos toco*)

Mask Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta concinna*)

Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

All photos by Al Viola except Gila Woodpecker by Joy Viola