

## WE REMEMBER CURTIS...

CAROLYN HURLESS  
1745 Rice Avenue  
Lima, OH 45805

I first met Curtis Anderson very briefly at my first AAVSO meeting in 1959 when it was held in Chicago. I met so many notables at that time, and I was brand new in the organization, that I couldn't remember everyone exactly. I do remember that one male member was extremely tall--6'8"--and later I was to find that this was Curtis, one of AAVSO's most enthusiastic observers. He was walking upright at that time.

As time went on, and I started to correspond with more and more AAVSO members, Curtis was one of my earliest correspondents. Then for a long time I didn't hear from him. Then, for some reason which I cannot yet recall, I had reason to call him. At that time he was living in Minneapolis. I was shocked to find that he'd been stricken with MS--multiple sclerosis. The year was 1961. Curtis had been an engineer with General Mills and was now confined to a wheelchair, never to walk or work again.

We spoke just a short while on the phone, but our exchange of letters increased tremendously from that time on. After I started to do Variable Views, Curtis, eager to help, started the "Inner Sanctum Column," where observers who wished to do so sent in only their Inner Sanctum observations each month, and he would list them in order of RA & DEC., the magnitude, time, and observer, and in this way each "IS" observer could see how he or she was doing compared with other observers. This continued for several years.

In 1965 Curtis received the Merit Award. This award is given to AAVSOers of outstanding merit and caliber who have observed under the most arduous of conditions. This certainly applied to Curtis, for each night he observed, it was from a wheelchair. Year round, and in the coldest of Minnesota nights, he'd set the alarm, arise on a cold Minnesota morning, with the temperatures well below zero and go out to observe, if only a half dozen irregulars. He knew how very important those morning observations were to fill in the empty curves.

Curtis' observing equipment consisted of a fine 10" reflector that was housed in a convenient shelter in his backyard. In front of this housing was a large concrete "patio". When the little observatory's front doors were opened, the telescope was easily rolled out on wheels and the evening was underway. The tube was easily rotated for nearly every position in the sky. Curtis sometimes used binoculars for stars when he felt less than up to maneuvering the telescope. He named his observatory "Mira Observatory". He loved the irregulars and LPVs equally well and even managed some solar observing in his early observing days. He wrote literally hundreds of letters to the new young or old AAVSOers just starting a variable star program; many of those newcomers are still in the ranks of the AAVSO.

In 1968, when Leslie Peltier observed his fiftieth observing anniversary, Curtis was present. It was a combined celebration and Spring AAVSO meeting, with some 128 members in attendance. Curtis came in by plane to Dayton/Vandalia airport, where Don and I picked him up. It was a glorious time for all, but it meant the most to Curtis, for the illness that made him prisoner to a wheelchair seemed less confining when he was able to visit with us.

From 1961 to November 15, 1976, when he passed away, Curtis led a life of trips to the hospital for times of both short and lengthy confinement. I have many letters written during various stays in the hospital, where a letter starts, "This is now my three-hundredth day in Unity". But somehow whatever tenacious faith Curtis had deep in his soul, he never missed sending in a report to AAVSO headquarters, and shortly before his death, he sent in his 600th consecutive report! Sometimes, as ill as he was, he'd somehow struggle into his wheelchair --or if he were flat on his back, be lifted to a hospital transport

cot and be wheeled to a window--and make that one lone estimate to keep his report consecutive. Confined as he was to a wheelchair--and before his illness wracked real havoc on his body--Curtis would send in over 4,000 estimates in a year. He was a top observer for many years, and is an exclusive member of the "Millionaires Club", made up of people whose estimates happened to land on a millionth or half millionth mark. Leslie Peltier, Paul Goodwin, and I are also among those whose estimates fell right on those significant numbers.

During the last several years, phone calls to and from Curtis became more frequent, and many of these calls were during his longer and more painful stays in the hospital. I have lost count of the number of skin grafts he endured due to skin problems resulting from long confinements to bed. Probably the most outstanding and remarkable and consistent part of Curtis' conversation was, "I know this will be a long siege, but I have good doctors and they have assured me this will be the last time for surgery for a long time. As soon as I get my strength back, I'm going to visit you and the Peltiers, and also go out to see Mary and Tom Cragg". His lifelong dream was to visit Ford Observatory on Mt. Peltier and view his beloved variables through the 18" out there. Tom Cragg assured him that he'd be gotten up the stairs into the observatory section, and they would have a special rig and hoist all set to get him to the eyepiece.

During the last part of October and the beginning of November 1976, Curtis began to fail. His letters showed the handwriting of an agonized human being, but the words were the thread of hope--to get better, to do many of the new charts Clint had sent him, and to make those visits.

Finally, came a call to the effect that he had been rushed to the hospital with a high fever and was about to go in to have a major operation. He was in intensive care, and a phone was brought to him, the receiver placed to his ear. His breathing was labored and his voice scarcely a whisper. I tried so hard to talk to him. I told him he was loved and cherished by us all, and please to think only of getting better. That was a Saturday afternoon. Later that night, after surgery, I was again called to be told that he'd survived the operation. Even the doctors were incredulous!

Again, the receiver was placed to his ear, and though he couldn't talk at all, being too weak, I could. I believed that he would make it. I told him so over and over again.

On Monday night, November 15, just before I was to leave for Leslie's to observe, a family member called to tell me that Curtis had passed away just a little while ago.

I went on over to Leslie's and we observed. Neither of us said much. Our first star was SS CYG and it was near maximum. Totally unexpected, for it had already had a maximum less than 18 to 20 days before. We both knew that the light from that star started eons ago.

I had never lost a friend, so far, in my life until Curtis. Between us, Curtis and I shared a beautiful friendship, though many miles separated us. Our love for variable stars and music, and even baseball and football, stood as common factors in long letters. Once over the years, and at the moment I do not recall the year, I flew to visit Curtis at his new home in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, where he lived with his wonderful mother and father. His room was filled with mementoes of his various loves--music and stars. Books everywhere, and on one wall was his Merit Award. He adored S/F and his collection of books was an S/F lover's paradise, including his astronomy books.

I took plenty of slides along that weekend, and we talked continuously, with perhaps four hours of sleep. It was a weekend to remember. Curtis did visit with us on several other occasions, one being the dedication of Allen Heasley's observatory in Warren, Ohio. I don't think that for as long as I live I will ever know another person with the courage and faith of Curtis Anderson.

The inward soul of a person is altered when they have the privilege of knowing a Curtis Anderson in their own lifetime. Curtis lived in a home with loving parents who saw to his every need. It is a sim-

ple fact that without their care and love his life would have been much shorter. It is also a fact that all AAVSOers who either knew Curtis or wrote to him made his day a little brighter when their letters crossed his doorstep, especially when he was so ill that he could not reply and used Variable Views to explain his plight.

For those AAVSOers who knew Curtis and his limited, painful life, he has been an inspiration as a faithful observer who, no matter how badly he felt, tried his very best to get that important variable star estimate. For those who read this in the years to come, may these words continue to serve as inspiration as we long remember a wonderful and faithful AAVSOer, Curtis Anderson.



From left to right: Leslie Peltier, Curtis Anderson,  
Carolyn Hurless

#### CURTIS ANDERSON MEMORIAL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Curtis was a true "lover of the Starry Heavens", and a true lover of AAVSO and AAVSO'ers. He had concern for all the members and especially for new observers. He knew how important it is to help them. To all AAVSO'ers he is a symbol of love, devotion, strength and courage. In the meeting of the AAVSO Council on May 13, 1977, the Council decided to set up a Curtis Anderson Memorial Sponsorship Program. This is a program which will enable observers from countries where it is not possible to send money to become members of AAVSO through a member sponsorship by our members here. This sponsorship program will achieve some of the dreams of Curtis -- namely to share the love of observing with newcomers to the field all around the world. AAVSO'ers who want to remember Curtis in this special way by sponsoring a new member, please write to Headquarters.

J.A.M.