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Alan at a club meeting in November 2014

In Memoriam Alan J. Kohn 1931 - 2022

Dr. Alan J. Kohn, Professor Emeritus of Biology at the University of Washington, Adjunct Curator of Malacology at the Burke Museum, and long-time member of the Pacific Northwest Shell Club, passed away in Seattle on Tuesday, November 15, 2022. He died peacefully at the age of 91. He was pre-deceased by his devoted wife of 55 years, Marion Adachi Kohn, and survived by his loving children and grandchildren.

Alan was born in 1931, and spent his childhood in Connecticut, exploring the shores of Long Island Sound. After receiving a B.A. from Princeton in 1953, he went on to earn his Ph.D. from Yale in 1957. He completed his doctorate

under G. Evelyn Hutchinson, and his dissertation was one of the first to test Hutchinson's concept of ecological niches using Hawaiian cones snails.

Fittingly named, Dr. Kohn spent the remainder of his long, illustrious career working on cones. Following his graduate studies, Alan became an Assistant Professor at Florida State University in 1958; shortly thereafter, in 1961, he moved to the University of Washington as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Zoology (later Biology). He became an Associate Professor in 1963, and was promoted to full Professor in 1967. He continued to carry out fieldwork in marine ecosystems throughout the world, and was invited to participate in many scientific expeditions.

His research broadly aimed to better understand the evolutionary and ecological processes that have led to high biological diversity in the marine tropics. More specifically, he was primarily interested in the evolutionary history and ecology – including the diversity, morphology, and distribution – of Conidae, one of the largest families of marine molluscs. Over the course of his career, he authored more than 120 peer-reviewed papers, 6 books, and numerous popular articles, reports, and reviews.

During his tenure as a professor, he regularly taught invertebrate zoology courses at Friday Harbor Laboratories. Through his teaching and research, Alan mentored hundreds of undergraduates, graduate students, and post-doctoral scholars – many of whom have gone on to make their own marks in science, research, and academia. Importantly, he was renowned for encouraging students who were traditionally underrepresented in these fields.

Despite a heavy research and teaching load, Alan continued to serve the professional community in additional capacities. Shortly after his arrival at the UW, he was appointed Adjunct Curator of Malacology at the Burke Museum, where he spent countless hours caring for the shell collection and overseeing its growth. He was a loyal supporter of the museum, and recently helped establish the Rohwer-Kohn Endowment to fund a future curatorship.

Alan retired from the UW in 1998, but continued on as Professor Emeritus – working in his office, visiting museum collections, attending conferences, publishing papers, mentoring students, and collaborating with colleagues. His passion for learning, his curiosity about the natural world, and his commitment to his community remained resolute even in his final years.

Alan discovered the Pacific Northwest Shell Club less than a year after he arrived in Washington and joined the club in early 1962. He was an active member for more than 60 years. He generously shared his expertise and presented a number of programs to the club over the years. Members have been some of his students, colleagues, friends, and fellow volunteers at the Burke Museum.

Those who had the honor of interacting with Alan know that he was a great scientist, a gifted teacher, and a generous colleague. He was a dear friend and mentor to many of us, and his gentle nature and kindness will not be forgotten. His legacy will live on in the knowledge that he generated, in the collections that he curated, and in the people whose careers and lives he touched. He will be missed.