In Memoriam: Bernhard Otto Seraphin

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College of Optical Sciences Professor Emeritus Bernhard Otto Seraphin, a pioneer in the fields of solid-state physics, semiconductors and solar energy conversion, died on Nov. 18, exactly two weeks after celebrating his 89th birthday.

Seraphin was born in Berlin and was preceded in death by his only brother, Ulrich. A survivor of active combat after being drafted into the German Gebirgsjaeger (mountain troops), "Bernie," as he was known to friends and family, was drawn to study science after a memorable childhood visit to a cloud chamber in a physics lab. He pursued advanced degrees in Germany, obtaining a master's degree at Friedrich Schiller University in 1949 and a doctorate at Humboldt University in 1951.

In the 1970s, he began working with Aden Meinel [1] at the University of Arizona's Optical Sciences Center — now the College of Optical Sciences [2] — solving many of the early challenges presented in the development of solar energy conversion. In addition to guiding more than 20 students through the process of earning a doctorate, Seraphin shared his passion for science internationally. He retired as Professor Emeritus from the UA in October 1989 but continued as acting director of the University's Office of International Programs [3]. He hosted several UNESCO-sponsored workshops and meetings abroad, feeling a strong obligation to share knowledge with those less fortunate. He shared a great love of the outdoors with his family and friends, inspiring those unfamiliar with nature to discover its myriad delights with him, and gently prodding experienced hikers ever onward by reminding them that "he who rests, rusts."

His excitement about what was just around the next corner was contagious, according to those who knew him.

He is survived by his wife, Supapan Seraphin — a UA professor of materials science and engineering — and four daughters, Elke, Gudrun, Maya and Eva, from previous marriages. In lieu of flowers or services, Seraphin's family asks that friends and colleagues celebrate him by volunteering for or making a charitable contribution to any organization supporting higher education or nature.

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