

UNDAUNTED ENTHUSIASM

Dr. Alex L. Shigo

May 8 1930-October 6, 2006

The world lost more than a man on the night of October 6. Dr. Shigo was many things to many people, he was a Husband, Father, Brother, Grandfather, Uncle, Friend, Teacher, Student, Mentor, Scientist, Musician, Philosopher.

Our loss is great, but what he gave to us is greater. We have all gained in knowledge of how trees function, but more importantly, he taught us how humans should function. If all that you learned from Alex was about trees, than you missed most of what he was about. Trees are what Alex did, they were not who he was

He taught us about living well, as all great teachers do, by example. He was kind, gentle, loving, generous, challenging, stimulating, encouraging, humorous, curious, determined, enthusiastic... I know that we are supposed to be able to define ourselves in ten words or less, but I just could not do it for Al.

Dr. Shigo had the amazing ability to treat every person as if they were of the utmost importance to him, and it wasn't an act. He truly cared about people. One of his many motto's was "I love everybody, and if they don't love me, that is their fault. When he spoke to you, he looked at you, and you knew that he was truly interested in you. The intensity of his attention could be intimidating at times. Anyone who asked the a question that they should have known the answer to and fell under the weight of those penetrating blue eyes knows this. When Dr. Shigo was with you, he was just with you. He wasn't just pressing the flesh, signing books and moving on in the crowd.

There was a sheet of paper found near his desk with some of his thoughts on it. There were about 15 thoughts on the page but the following stood out to me:

- Believe in something!
- Always provide time for love and thinking
- Talk a lot to those you love
- Don't get cynical or intolerant
- Pursue curiosity and fun
- Ethics are the values that determine human behavior
- Students bring hope!
- Give freely of your ideas and you will never die

If we can not find the information about trees that we need in any of the hundreds of scientific publications, dozens of books, thousands of slides or the many videos that he created, I guess that we will have to find the answers for ourselves. He taught us how to look at, and touch, the trees to find the answers. He also connected many of us together so that we may share our experiences and learn together.

He also taught us to accept that we are wrong when someone shows us that we are wrong. Some of Alex's opponents viewed him as wishy-washy, because he would change his

view on something if he found out he was wrong. Many people had greater respect for him because he was one of the first “experts” to publicly state, “I don’t know,” or “I was wrong.”

He was always learning, challenging himself and loved to be shown new things. I think that he liked it when people challenged him and could prove that he was wrong. He had no time for those that said he was wrong because his views were different or may have cause people to change what they did.

Some people were afraid that his teachings were going to cost them money. The reality was that those who truly followed what he taught, and practiced it on a daily basis, often made more money than those that did not.

As we move forward, slowly at first, but ever forward, we should remember the man and the messages. We should honor, not deify him. We should celebrate, not mourn him. We should build libraries, and schools, not shrines. We should get our hands dirty digging for roots instead of merely wiping our tears. We should strive to be better people, not just better arborists.

Alex, thank you for making me a better person first and a better arborist, second. I will continue to learn and share what I have learned with others. I look forward to walking in the woods with you again. I have more that I need to do first, so please wait for me...

Tim Walsh
CTSP, Arborist, Tree Climber, Safety Trainer and Consultant