The Wisby Family suggests those who wish to remember Warren can make a donation in his name to their favorite charity. Some have chosen to donate directly to the Office of Advancement at the Rosenstiel School.

Thanks to Stephanie Nissen, Karen Bradford, Jean Yehle, Eloise Zakevich, Nancy Voss, Joseph Prospero, Art Myrberg, Don DeSylva, and Harry DeFerrari for their help with this special edition of SOUNDINGS.

Michele M. Rowand, Editor
In gathering information for this issue of SOUNDINGS I received several stories from the faculty, newspaper articles and a transcript of an interview with School Historian Jean Yehle done back in February 1992. Any interesting collection of impressions have emerged. Dr. DeFerrari’s view of Warren as the hunter/fisherman seems to match many other stories which paint almost an Ernest Hemmingway picture of the man. “He liked to hunt but he hated to kill anything” said Harry. “Warren was really a man’s man and woman’s man... he fits the description of all the great scientists of the world.” Don DeSylva stated.

Warren was known to dress up for the Marine Mardi Gras parties and make up limericks on special occasions like Walton Smith’s 80th birthday party. Highly sociable and sometimes flirty, his voice was described as mellifluous for its high content of honey. He used humor to ease tension and his fishing stories to change the subject at the lunch table away from complaints. “I don’t know anyone who had a larger repertoire of jokes except perhaps Gary Brass. When the two were at the table, the joke-telling competition was intense and hilarious.” said Joe Prospero.

At the memorial service Art Myrberg recalled Warren as the accomplished pilot who gave Art a ride over Crandon Park and pointed out the group of about twenty swimmers splashing in the water and the two large ominous objects swimming between the swimmers and the shore. He remembered Warren commenting on how he saw this all the time when he flew over Key Biscayne and how peacefully humans and sharks regularly coexisted. “He was an expert on firearms, ballistics, hunting dogs, animals of all sorts,” stated Harry. “He was truly a font of knowledge...” said Don DeSylva in his correspondence.

Born in Denmark and raised in Racine Wisconsin, Warren Wisby’s Ph.D. was in zoology. His supervisor, Dr. Arthur Hassler, Chief of the University of Wisconsin limnology lab was quoted as saying “Warren has an uncanny ability with animals. A keen observer, he is especially skilled in interpreting the intentions of animals that can’t talk.” During Wisby’s time at UW German naturalist Konrad Lorenz commented “Wisby is the most gifted young animal behaviorist I have met on my American tour.” His early research involved the detection of phenols in the water by minnows. His work expanded and in 1961 he began his career at the University of Miami teaching a class on shark behavior.

His work at UM was interrupted for several years when he kept his promise to his friend John F. Kennedy to head up the new National Aquarium which he did from 1964 until 1972. Upon his return to the Rosenstiel School he worked as Assistant, Associate and eventually interim Dean.

Taking a break at an ONR conference in Bimini in 1963, of Warren Wisby (second from left) and other RSMAS nobilities such as Don DeSylva (bottom center), Walton Smith (bottom right), Fritte Racey (center), Gil Voss (top second from right) and Claire Idyll (over Gil’s right shoulder). Others include Eddy Kochcin, Dick Robins, and Sam Gruber. The photo was taken at the Bimini Inn Hotel.

“Sharks are in all our waters and they’re not bothering anybody...so why do people hate them so much? People often do the damnedest things for the damnedest reasons.”

Warren Wisby

Art Myrberg

In his time at the Rosenstiel School Warren had been offered a helicopter pad for the School by Bebe Rebozo, had stood up to UM’s then President Henry King Stanford over the “School of Earth and Planetary Sciences” issue, while the rest of the RSMAS faculty looked on. He saw the government proposal process go from “no more than three or four pages and that would be it, with a budget...” to “...when I got back (from Washington), proposals were thick as a telephone directory.” Warren confessed to having altered the plans for the Science and Administration Building so he, as the then Associate Dean could look out at the bay and leave the less esthetic view of the road to the Dean.

When asked in his interview by Jean Yehle to sum up his experience at RSMAS he said “…a lot of things went right and that’s why the School is still there. And, more often than not, what went right went right with the faculty rather than Main Campus administration or School administration. And it was because faculty liked the place and wanted to be there.”

His list of graduate students contains four names: Richard Lee Aaron, William Frank Herrnkind, Donald Richard Nelson and our own resident shark expert Samuel Gruber. The RSMAS Library has a record of six papers published in his name. Titles include “Effects of Light and Moon Phase on the Behavior of Pink Shrimp”, “Sound Perception in Elasmobranches”, “Effect of Factory Occlusion on Migrating Silver Salmon”, Sun-Orientation and Homing in Fishes” “Survival Behavior” and “Net Light on the Eel Puzzle”. In the latter publication, Warren commented on how far biological science had come in its understanding of sea creatures. “It is true that hindsight is better than foresight and it is almost impossible to imagine now that the world’s foremost scientists once held that goose barnacles did, in fact, give rise to geese and that when eels rubbed themselves against rocks the pieces of skin rubbed off later came to life as young eels.” Warren’s wide knowledge in animal behavior contributed to the understanding and likely, the successful future of many sea creatures.

His life began all over again as a gentleman farmer when he purchased 20 acres of lime groves in Homestead Florida and retired there with Audra, dedicated to their care. In 1992, their house and groves took a major hit during Hurricane Andrew and like many of us who were here then, he drew on the emotional support of his family and healing process of time to get his life back on track.

Joe Prospero sums it up, “In the end Warren’s greatest legacy to us is that he showed that it was possible to lead a full and fulfilling life both professionally and personally and to enjoy every minute of it.”

Joe Prospero

At the memorial service current Dean Otis Brown noted that during Warren’s administration the institution was in flux. It was a difficult time to be the Dean. Relationships with the Coral Gables campus were often strained because of varying views on issues of support. Joseph Prospero wrote “Those were critical years for the school, a time when it was making the transition from a small, rather relaxed marine lab to the major institution that it is today. One can point to a number of important contributions that Warren made during that difficult period. But his most important contribution was that he held it all together. During changing roles and changing leadership, Warren was a constant.” Joe went on to say about the service at St. Andrew’s Church, “The people who rose to speak of him came from every social strata in South Florida. They spoke in a wide range of dialects and with different vocabularies, but their testimony was the same - he had been their friend.”