

# Erich Wolfgang Vogt

November 12, 1929 – February 19, 2014

Celebration of Life – March 8, 2014

## SPEAKERS' NOTES

### **Lisa Vogt (MC)**

On behalf of my sister, my brothers and our extended families, I welcome you here this afternoon.

One of my father's gifts was in bringing people together. He would therefore have been tremendously pleased by your joining us here this afternoon.

We have planned a simple celebration. You will hear four speakers and a few remembrances, and when last words are spoken, we invite you all to stay and share a glass of wine with friends, colleagues and family.

As many of you know, my father was a scientist who lived life large, and with purpose. He became a scientist because, as a small boy, standing on a wide prairie, he looked skyward at the geese flying overhead...with wonder. He was not a religious man. But the world was a place of wonder for him.

Our first speaker is one of Dad's colleagues, Ewart Blackmore, who is a senior research scientist and one of the founding members of TRIUMF...he's also someone who worked with Dad for over 40 years. Ewart knows something about Big Science and Dad's role at TRIUMF and in the science community.

### **Ewart Blackmore**

It is a privilege and an honour to give this tribute to Erich Vogt on behalf of his friends and colleagues at TRIUMF and UBC.

Unlike Erich who was always able to give an entertaining presentation without notes, making it serious or humorous or usually both, I will read mine to make sure I cover what I want to say in a reasonable time. I first met Erich in 1963 when I was a summer student working in the nuclear physics group at Chalk River and Erich was by then a highly respected theoretical nuclear physicist. I would see him wandering the halls near my office in a bright plaid shirt and he seemed unapproachable to me because of his lofty reputation. However I soon found that he was very interested in the work of summer students and would attend the seminars given by students on their summer work projects and offer useful advice

on their presentations – sometimes through challenging questions but always in his friendly way.

I then went west to UBC for graduate work in physics and Erich followed two years later and was one of my graduate student professors. My research supervisor was John Warren and it was during the mid-60s when the plans for a new accelerator at UBC were being discussed, leading to the choice of Reg Richardson's design of a 500 MeV H-cyclotron. While John Warren with his team from the UBC physics department Karl Erdman, Bruce White, Ed Auld, Mike Craddock and others were busy on the technical design of what was to become the TRIUMF project it was Erich who led the political campaign for funding with his eastern contacts as well as providing important theoretical physics support.

Then in 1968 we learned that Erich and others had been successful in getting federal funding for TRIUMF and the serious design could start. I joined TRIUMF in 1969 working on several aspects of the design under the chief engineer Joop Bergerjohn. The next 5 years efforts were rewarded in December 1974 with first beam from the cyclotron. Erich led the way as chairman of the TRIUMF Board of Management and occasionally an energetic magnet shimmer but also found time to be a Vice President at UBC.

In 1981 he became TRIUMF director serving for the next 13 years. We had a cyclotron that met its design goals, a modest set of research equipment, but it was Erich that turned the laboratory into a successful user facility with a period of assured funding. He also organized the laboratory into the present divisional structure which has served us well for the past 30 plus years. I was fortunate to be in the first group of division heads so I came to appreciate his leadership and motivational skills and his ability to stickhandle around difficult issues. He diversified the lab into medical physics and material science.

But Erich's most important legacy was to make TRIUMF a truly international laboratory, a place where outside scientists loved to come to do their research, and the major laboratories of the world took notice of our technical and research successes. Erich and Barbara's summer lawn parties where many visiting scientists and their wives were invited to enjoy their hospitality (and admire Erich's tomatoes) were an important ingredient in this success.

Erich started TRIUMF's role in supporting international projects with our involvement in the HERA project in Germany in the mid-1980s. He developed close ties with Japan and Israel as well as the United States. All of this led to the KAON Factory where Erich became Dr. KAON in promoting the idea of a very powerful new accelerator for kaon and neutrino physics, with close to a billion dollar price tag. Many of us worked on the design, some started doing kaon physics at other labs and for the period from 1985 to 1994 it was a significant

effort for the laboratory. Erich led the way, first getting government support for the design study, then a commitment from the province and then significant international support from Germany and Japan. Some of us were gearing up to build the project when in 1994 the federal government pulled the plug on KAON. However these ideas were passed on to Japan and helped in the construction of the J-PARC facility which has a number of TRIUMF scientists involved. Fortunately for TRIUMF a new era started under Alan Astbury with plans to build the ISAC facility which has turned out to be a wise choice and support the CERN LHC project with accelerator and detector contributions, also a wise choice.

Erich returned to UBC teaching until he was 80, with more than 5000 1st year students attending his early morning physics lectures. But he always maintained a TRIUMF office, always kept an interest in what was going on at TRIUMF, and always was ready for a hallway greeting or conversation in any language. He was a prolific science writer with several illuminating articles on the history of Canadian science as well as obituaries for others where he set the standard.

Erich was the last remaining of the first 4 TRIUMF directors who were involved from the beginning. John Warren who along with Erich were the co-founders of TRIUMF, each with their special talents, Reg Richardson with the innovative idea for a meson producing cyclotron and who was there at the controls when we got first beam and Jack Sample who was able to get crucial funding in the late 1970s to allow us to complete the cyclotron beam lines and experimental facilities.

It is truly an end of an era for TRIUMF with Erich's untimely passing. He was a true inspiration for all of us at TRIUMF and he will be sorely missed and not only for his Christmas fruitcake.

**Lisa Vogt (MC)**

As a grandfather, Dad played an influential role with his 16 grandchildren. He was always happiest in front of a classroom....or when he was showing his world to his grandchildren. His grandson Eric, the fish whisperer, has some remembrances to share.

**Eric Vogt**

Hello everyone, thank you all very much for coming here.

As grandpa used to say, I am little Eric.

I was chosen to speak on behalf of the grandchildren today because I am the primary individual contributor to the total tonnage of Erich Vogt's offspring. Yes, just like with his tomatoes and his Christmas cakes, grandpa kept track of the total weight of his progeny – which is currently hovering around one and three quarter tons. Not only was this something that he loved to boast about, but he never wasted an opportunity to add to it. Frequently reminding the grandchildren of

who had consumed the most farmer's sausage or who had eaten the greatest number of helpings at a family dinner.

I was initially reluctant to speak today as I feared that I could never adequately reflect on such an amazing, influential and inspiring man. But then I started thinking about Grandpa, and if there is one thing that he taught me it is that it's ok to make a fool of yourself sometimes. I mean this in a good way and to my family, or to anyone else who has visited a Zoo with Erich, I encourage you to think about how he loved to speak to the baboons. It also dawned on me that it really doesn't matter what I say, because if Grandpa were here he would have been proud. He was incredibly proud of all of his grandchildren. That is just the way he was. His love for all of us was equal, unbiased and unconditional.

Grandpa was also tremendously supportive. He encouraged us to take on new challenges and to work to our full potential. But more than anything he encouraged us to be who we are, to focus our energy on the things we are most passionate about. And though he often told us this, he did not have to. For his life and his story were the perfect examples of what could be achieved with the right amount of passion, determination and hard work.

There is no question that Erich had a gifted mind and I feel that we are all truly fortunate to have grown up around such man. It seemed like Grandpa knew more than a little bit about almost everything, and he frequently surprised me with this knowledge. To his grandchildren this was somewhat like having a walking, talking encyclopedia to rely on. But what was more meaningful was that he was able to talk, in depth, to each and every one of us about the things we are most passionate about. Considering how many of us there are, and how diverse our interests are, this is exceptionally impressive and something I am very thankful for.

While all of us have very different interests and are headed in many different directions, there are also many things that we have in common. Most apparent I believe is our sense of humor. And for that we must thank Grandpa as he always found ways to make us laugh. But with our sense of humor we also developed patience, as we have all heard his jokes and limericks countless times.

The effects that both my Grandpa Erich and Grandma Barbara had on their grandchildren was tremendous and is readily apparent to a thoughtful eye. For instance, take:

- Naomi's energy on the stage,
- Deborah's passion for poetry
  
- Samuel's goofy smile,

- Parker's appreciation of music
- Nics charm and charisma
- Matt's unique sense of humour
- Alex's powerful gas
  
- Madeleine's commitment and determination,
- Patrick's enormous sense of family,
- Gabrielle's love for all things German
- Charlotte, well she is a perfect reflection of grandma,
- Peter's thirst for knowledge,
  
- Megan's appetite for tomatoes
- Kennedy's love of history
- Bri, well she owes her life to grandpa, for he saved her from drowning in Tofino.
- And finally, my insatiable appetite for Costco hotdogs.

Thus, to my siblings, my cousins, and all of my family. When you are down, when you miss Grandpa, or Grandma, I encourage all of you to look around. Seek comfort in knowing that each and every one of us carries a different piece of their spirit and that they will be with us as for long as we are all together.

Thank you.

#### **Lisa Vogt (MC)**

As a father, Dad taught us that this was a world to be savoured.... when we were young, he carried us high on his shoulders through the wilds of Algonquin Park and skated with us on the frozen Ottawa river.

When he was not teaching, he was in the mountains. I can't count the number of times we took the switchbacks to Garibaldi Lake, or walked the trails in Manning Park or the North Shore mountains.....my sister, as a teenager (with better things to do) usually complaining that she had a brain tumour or some other life threatening condition....or one of my brothers (with an abundance of self-sufficiency genes), confidently striding off in the wrong direction to be lost for hours... but our dad, entirely oblivious to such distractions.

My brother David, the star gazer, will tell you more.

#### **David Vogt**

Thank you all for being here today for this celebration of an exceptionally unique, brilliant, and loving man. My siblings Susan, Lisa, Jon and Robert have honoured me with sharing a few words on their behalf.

Our father would have been the first person to agree that he had a wonderfully fortunate life. This isn't to say that he was lucky, although he would agree with that as well. It is more that wonderful fortune was something that he very purposefully pursued in life. My thoughts today will address this facet of his nature.

Our father was fiercely proud of his prairie immigrant origin. He considered it his greatest blessing. As with his beloved tomatoes, he believed in fertile soil and good seed stock, both of which were abundant in tiny Steinbach, Manitoba. His sense of the natural and cultural inspiration available in his home village verged on the magical.

In his diaries, I found a long letter he wrote to himself on the occasion of his sixteenth birthday, right at the end of WWII, where he assessed his life progress so far and admonished himself to work even harder. In this letter he set a remarkably simple formula for the rest of his life: to be driven by wonder. Specifically the wonder within nature, music and poetry.

He nourished his wonder in nature by coming to BC and embarking on countless mountain hikes, driving holidays in the Rockies, and excursions in the rainforests and beaches of Tofino. He nourished his wonder in music by becoming an expert on the lives and works of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bach and others. And he nourished his wonder in poetry within the mathematics, symmetry and abstractions of nuclear physics.

That focus on wonder almost certainly brought him his first overwhelming fortune in life: our mother. Why else would a refined girl from River Heights in Winnipeg agree to go out with a country boy? They shared a love of intellect, culture, travel and children. It was a fortuitous match.

Our mother was also our father's ticket out. He knew his world was beyond Manitoba, and knew he would need our mother's refinement and partnership to get where he wanted to go. My elder sisters were born in Princeton, NJ, I was born in Birmingham, England, and my younger brothers were born in Deep River, Ontario, all before we eventually came to Vancouver. As children we couldn't realize how unusually cosmopolitan our lives were with international visitors, knights, ladies, and laureates being regular visitors to our home.

For such an exuberant and extroverted individual, our father was also an intensely rational and private man. And yet he was also capable of acts of staggering endearment. Just one example, which he did every morning at precisely 7:00 am outside my bedroom door, was to shout at the top of his lungs, "Wake up, you lazy bugger!" It brings tears to my eyes even now...

One day, when I was an undergraduate, and he was a UBC Vice President, he happened to cycle by in his characteristically slightly-rumpled attire, whistling the signature tune from Don Giovanni. He didn't notice me, and the classmate I was walking with, who didn't know him, spontaneously commented, "There goes a happy janitor!" He was indeed an innately happy and good-natured man.

A defining example of his unique humour from this same period was when he wanted to take a large group of visiting Chinese dignitaries on his favourite hike to Garibaldi Lake. Solely for this event, he took the time out from his already hectic schedule to get a bus driver's license, driving them all to Whistler entirely for the delight of demonstrating to his amazed communist visitors that Canada was a worker's paradise, where a university vice president could also be a bus driver, and vice versa.

One of our father's favourite movies was a 1998 Danish film called, "The Celebration", where a family gathers to honour their patriarch's birthday and the entire event implodes as the eldest son reveals the patriarch's chronic abuses. Such dark human comedy appealed to the rich, low-German part of our father's humour.

I can't offer similar revelations at this celebration of our patriarch. He loved us immensely. However, he did spend even more time with his other beloved family at TRIUMF. Anyone who knows Erich will remember his scathing opinions of politicians, bureaucrats, etc., but I never heard him utter a single unkind word about any member of his TRIUMF and Physics family. There are so many of you here - he loved you well.

And he nurtured other families through the Vancouver Institute, Science Council, Science World, the Vancouver Roundtable and organizations around the globe. While he was not religious in any way, he seemed to subscribe to the Jewish theory of creation, where order in the Universe wasn't something to be discovered so much as created through sheer force of will and personal energy. Innumerable people and projects have benefited from the sheer productive force of his attention.

Perhaps his greatest love beyond our family was teaching first year physics. He invested enormous creativity in courting the wonder of young scientists; that same wonder that propelled him. He taught his last class only a few short years ago when he was 80. He said he wanted to quit while he still had the best teacher ratings in the department! Perhaps it wasn't a fair contest: how many other physics teachers could say that they'd known and worked with the legends of their field, including Einstein, Bohr and Dirac?

Yes, our father was competitive about everything. In the last years of his life, while doing the research for his family history and memoir, he said often that he aimed to live longer than his own father, who died at 89.

Well, he lost that one, but he won the battle of achieving a wonderfully fortunate life. He lived large and he loved large. If knowledge were money he would have been one of the wealthiest humans to have ever lived. We his children and grandchildren are wealthy and fortunate in turn.

First Nations peoples believed that when people die they become stars, so that we can always look up to them. There is a rare, dazzling and very colourful new star in our human firmament tonight.

Thank you.

**Lisa Vogt (MC)**

My father was one of six brothers. He was the 2nd oldest. His brother Peter was the 2nd youngest. Peter knew the young man on the front page of the pamphlet in your hands.

**Peter Vogt**

It is hard to follow a wonderful talk like the one just given by David. I will try my best.

Erich was a giant in my mind, bigger than life! I never really knew him as a child as he was already entering college when I was starting my elementary school. I was 11 years old when we visited Erich and Barbara in Princeton and realized that he was working with very important people. The war just ended seven years before that and even as a child I was aware of the importance of atomic energy. It had in fact ended the Second World War. Now my brother was trying to use atomic energy in more humanitarian pursuits. We drove by Dr. Einstein's home and saw Dr. Einstein out on his yard and he waved at my brother. You can only imagine how impressive that was to a young boy.

At age 15, I visited Erich and Barbara in Deep River, Ontario. When I arrived late in the evening, Erich woke up all of his three children at that time and herded them down the staircase with sleepy eyes and all wearing their pajamas so they could meet "Uncle Peter." Needless to say, Barbara was not happy about the interruption of their sleep and she let him know that. Barbara could be very firm with Erich, because she needed to be. While I was on that visit at the age of 15, I did note Erich's deep love for Barbara and his children. He took every chance possible to take them on nature-walks, teach them about the wonders of the world, and of the benefits of physical pursuits versus sitting at home and watching television.



Visiting Erich and his family in Vancouver was always such a joy. He treated us well and would always share new adventures with us, such as hiking, exploring, and seeing the wonders of his world. This included trips to his TRIUMF project. Again, Erich was such a giant in my mind. I was standing in the foyer of his home when he was leaving to meet Prime Minister Trudeau to take him on a tour of a power plant or the TRIUMF project. It was a warm summer day and he was leaving wearing cut-off shorts that had a torn pocket at the back, a tee shirt, and flip-flop shoes. Barbara intercepted him at the door, took him by the tee shirt, and said, "Erich Vogt, where are you going dressed like that!!!" "You are not going to see the Prime Minister of Canada dressed like that!" Erich's reply was "Barbara, the Prime Minister is not coming to see how I am dressed, he is coming to see what I know!" I am sure all of you in the audience will realize who won that argument. Erich went upstairs, changed into proper clothes, and then left to meet the Prime Minister for his tour.

Erich always felt that I had aimed low in my pursuit of a medical degree. He couldn't stand anyone that wasn't aiming for a PhD. This is further reinforced by the fact that one of the requirements of my pre-med education was to take Physics 101. I took the course and proceeded to fail it. As luck would have it, I was walking down the campus of the University of Manitoba that summer with Erich when we happened upon Dr. Kelly who had taught both of us Physics 101. Dr. Kelly took one look at Erich and a close look at me and exclaimed, "This is a biological impossibility"! Erich got the greatest joy out of that and you can imagine how I felt.

It took about 40 years for me to get a small amount of revenge. It happened at the reception following Barbara's memorial service when we were at the home of Lisa and her husband, Chris. Erich was sitting on the couch wearing a blue blazer, a tie, and his gray slacks, and it was evident what he had been eating as a good portion of it was on the front of his jacket and tie, as it frequently would happen. I think we would all agree that Erich didn't pay much attention to his attire most of the time. I was standing visiting with the wife of one of Erich's colleagues and she asked me what my relationship was to Erich. I was wearing an Armani suit with a nice tie and always have tried to dress up to the expectations of my profession as a plastic surgeon. She called Erich to his feet and he came standing next to us and she said, "Are you indeed Peter's brother?" He said "yes" and she said, "This is a biological impossibility"!

Numbers were always so important to Erich. All of us had to listen to the number of pies that he had baked; the number of tomatoes that he had produced in his garden; the number of fruitcakes that he had baked and sent at Christmas time. I would like to make a confession today that I was the annual recipient of one of Erich's 6" x 6" fruit pies. Years ago I took one of these fruit pies and placed it in the bottom of a floral arrangement and set it at the door of two gay friends of

ours who were having an annual Christmas party. I didn't realize that even though I snuck up to their door that they had seen me. One year later at the same party, one of the men who was an artist had taken the fruitcake and had developed a beautiful Lucite case with a Lucite stand inside that bore the fruitcake with a brass placard that stated, "Fruitcake." Of course, this created an uproar at the party and everybody had a good laugh about it. My wife and I took it home and my wife being the interior designer that she was, took it to her studio and had the Lucite case electrified and made a lamp out of it with a very large, black shade over the top of the Lucite case. We then presented this to our gay couple at the next annual party. Not to be outdone, the artist friend made the lamp into a torchiere lamp that is approximately 5' high and still sits in his home to this day. This created such a stir that this exchange of Erich's fruitcake actually had a story written about it that appeared in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine. I never had the courage to reveal this story to my brother.

Our first brother died on March 31, 1997. It was a sad and untimely death. At the reception in the church basement following the funeral, Erich called over to me, "Well Peter, one down, five to go"! Again, numbers were so important to Erich throughout his life.

Following our brother's death, Erich and I began to connect as adults. Erich had a twin brother, Art, who was physically and mentally challenged and required care. Along with the considerable care of the Winnipeg family, we were able to help financially and also, to a lesser degree, physically to care for Art for the remainder of his life.

His love for his brothers was extended further when he received a knock on his door from a younger brother who had dealt with drug addiction all of his life. Erich not only took him in and helped him financially but offered him the lower level of his home for the remainder of his life. As our younger brother went through one-after-another health problem, Erich would visit him in the hospital virtually every day. He would remind me on our weekly calls of the number of times that he had driven down to Vancouver General Hospital to visit John. This was after he had stopped his teaching assignments at the University of British Columbia and I think to some degree this gave him a feeling of relevance. It certainly gave us all a feeling of his continued relevance.

Erich had an incredible amount of energy, stamina, interest, and wonder of the world around him. He would visit his family members in the State of Washington, Ontario, Minnesota, and would travel to all parts of the world to visit colleagues and friends that he had nurtured over the years. We talked every week for years. He seemed to have accepted my mediocrity of only having achieved an M.D. level of training. Also, after our conversations had ended, he would often slip and say, "Peter, I love you"!

Erich indeed led a relevant and a fortunate life. He chose a wonderful mate, had five wonderful robust children and their mates, and sixteen grandchildren, all of whom he loved tremendously. In the last few years of life, he worked hard to write a genealogical history for the benefit of all of his children. This was a massive work, but one that he appeared to enjoy immensely. He also tried to write to the end, a brief history of TRIUMF as he understood it. He also had a magnificent career and, like I, never felt that he had to work.

To some, Erich was an acquired taste, but to me he was a loving brother, a generous friend, and someone who made a difference.

Erich, since you were so intrigued by numbers, it is now five down and one to go. Also, since you were so competitive and wanted to live longer than our Father, you may feel you lost. I know you are listening and what I want you to hear is "I lost; I lost a brother who I loved and admired and whose memory I will cherish for the rest of my life."

Thank you.

**Lisa Vogt (MC)**

I am also reminded of this. In his early 70s, when Dad was in hospital following a heart valve replacement, two doctors came into his room to determine if he had suffered any cognitive loss as a result of the surgery. Mom, standing in the hall, overheard one of them ask dad to spell "world"...WORLD...and without missing a beat, dad spelt "world"...WHIRLED. One of the doctors then turned to the other and said that Dr. Vogt had taught him physics at UBC, and that he could lose half of his brain function and still be smarter than both of them put together.

We have received many tributes for Dad. I want now to share only two which represent Dad's two communities, town and gown. From the science and academic community, Haig Farris wrote a long remembrance. Haig is a venture capital pioneer and co-founded numerous high profile technology companies. He had deep Kaon, UBC, Science Council and Science World connections with Dad, and there was great mutual respect. His tribute reads in part as follows:

*"High energy physics was Erich. He was a prairie born cyclotron from birth to death. His high energy and ability to focus on and smash targets foolish enough to be in his path defined his world. He re-defined the phrase "whirling dervish". It wouldn't surprise me if the scientists determined he was the missing quark.*

*Erich was a scientist's scientist or more aptly a physicist's physicist. Physicists have that enviable ability to relish problems... particularly ones that seemingly have no solution. The study of physics creates a mindset of optimism that Erich personified more than anyone I have known.*

*He took his high energy and optimism with him in everything he did and we are all the better for it."*

The second remembrance is from Christopher Gaze, the artistic director of Bard on the Beach. Dad's world was also full of poetry. Into his 80s Dad could still recite, by heart, large tracks of Wordsworth and Shakespeare, among others. Dad enjoyed a friendship with Christopher Gaze, who was unable to be here this afternoon but sent this remembrance:

*"As soon as I became a member of our luncheon group, The Round Table, Erich became a friend. He reached out to me - he relentlessly promoted Bard, he personally supported us generously and he celebrated his 80th Birthday at Bard with 80 friends and family in our marquee and then we all joined him at the show.*

*We always received his annual Christmas cake which I shall miss greatly - it was traditional and delicious!*

*That he was a great man there is no question. A beautiful mind that soared above and beyond most of the rest of us - his academic life was connected to Einstein, Hawkins and a litany of other immortals."*

Thank you Christopher.

And so. A fortunate life, and a life well lived. For dad, that small boy on the prairie, the pursuit of scientific research was a pure and necessary joy. He lived his life with curiosity, and with wonder. His excellence as a scientist, a teacher, a parent and a grandparent was that he never lost that sense of wonder, and strove always to share it with others.

That closes the speaking portion of our afternoon. However, we would be very pleased if you would all join us now for a glass of wine and to share the camaraderie that was our father.

Thank you for coming.