



Donald Leroy Patten

March 11, 1929 - September 16, 2025

Donald Leroy Patten was born in Jennings, Oklahoma, on March 11, 1929, to Ollie Ann Patten (née Helms) and Henry Ray Patten. He died September 16, 2025, following Covid complications, in Houston, Texas, where he had moved in 2012 after a life of extraordinarily good health was interrupted by a pulmonary embolism and cardiac arrest in Norman, Oklahoma.

Donald never knew his oldest two siblings, Waneta Fay Patten and Leonard Dale Patten, who died before he was born. He was predeceased by his parents, his sister, Darlene Bixler, and brother, Jimmie Patten. He is survived by his sister, Marilyn Hall, nieces and nephews, Paul Patten, Ann Patten, Bob Bixler, Ron Bixler, Russell Hall, Mark Hall, and Carol Hall Burchfield, and numerous great-nieces and nephews.

Donald grew up in the Depression, and was none the worse for it. As a young boy he danced 'round the campfire with the Middle Creek Indian Baptist Church congregants at their community powwow near Holdenville, Oklahoma. Marilyn recalls Donald leading her and their friend, Naomi Cecil, on regular hikes over nearby hills and through fields in the region now marketed as Oklahoma's "Frontier Country." Donald cut firebreaks around wellheads to pay for flying lessons, and soloed at 16 in a surplus Taylorcraft L-2.

If the memorabilia his mother, then Donald, kept are any indication, both

cherished his accomplishments. They include a Neither Absent nor Tardy certificate, Hayes School (1940), graduation from the Lawndale School (a Common School seven miles northwest of Wetumka) (1943), third place in Standard Oratory, Class B, Oklahoma Baptist University District Tournament (1947), Oklahoma High School Honor Society, Holdenville Chapter (1947), and honor graduate of Holdenville High School (1947) (Naomi Cecil was valedictorian, an honor Donald was denied only because of attendance at other high schools). The Patten mortarboard tassel collection suggests at least five more graduation ceremonies for Donald, some perhaps as OU faculty rather than a graduate himself, but including one at OU for his own master's degree.

Donald taught mathematics and some astronomy at OU from his 1952 appointment as a graduate assistant until his retirement in 1995.

Before he retired, Donald was already a veteran traveler, and in 2004 he had earned the ITN 100 Nations Award for having flown or cruised to 100 countries. If Donald missed a chance to travel, it was only because OU football had a home game. Alumni who never took his class may remember him as a faithful stadium usher.

In 1999, Donald survived the Bridge Creek-Moore tornado, riding it out face down in his bathtub. "I'd never seen a tornado before. Come to think of it, I didn't see that one either." The next block over, some homesites were marked only by clean slabs.

Before his 2011 embolism, Donald hadn't seen a doctor or taken a pill in a decade. As his punishment for surviving, Russell wouldn't let Donald miss a single appointment, and he didn't thanks to care managers Levi, Doug, Annette, Linda, Karla, Teri, and Kesha. Donald was an ox, and he worked hard enough at occupational therapy to liberate himself from his gastric

feeding tube and to regain his mobility. At his peak post-embolism, he could walk the halls of Holly Hall Assisted Living three miles in the morning and three in the evening, confounding staff required to account for his location. He suffered five lithotripsies without so much as squeaking. As his photo attests, at 89 he looked better than most of us at 49.

Donald didn't miss children, having plenty of nieces and nephews he doted on. Each one that was asked imagined he or she was Donald's favorite. When he bought one a toy, he often bought the same for himself. Ann remembers Donald as her activities director growing up, taking her to fairs, museums, plays, bookstores, The Planetarium, parks, etc. "He was the greatest uncle." Paul and Ann attended OU while Donald taught there. Realizing they didn't know how to address an uncle that was faculty, he discreetly told each in turn, "You can call me Don on campus."

Like most of us, Donald was Paul's introduction to astronomy. Donald also inspired Paul to become a math professor, too. Reflecting on all the OU administration and staff Donald knew, he says, "I don't think Don had met anyone that he would call an enemy-- everyone was his friend."

Ron recalls Donald as their tour guide. For several years, Donald would plan vacations for Darlene's family and their parents. The Bixlers would drive from Indiana to Norman, and then travel together to Kermit, Texas, where the parents lived before retiring to Moore, Oklahoma. Donald planned a different road trip for all of them each year, including the Grand Canyon, a petrified forest, even the filming of High Chaparral in Tucson, with side trips to historic capitols, presidents' homes, and cemeteries of note. And when Donald retired, Ron says Donald became a real-life Indiana Jones, learning all the cultures of the people in areas he was traveling to. "He probably knew more than the people that lived there actually knew. Don was probably by far the smartest

man I ever, ever knew. He will be surely missed, and I will always remember all of the trips and things he did for everyone.”

Math was in Donald’s blood. Not only did he teach generations of OU students, he also trained secondary school teachers how to teach math. He tutored nursing candidates in his 80’s while at Holly Hall, and was explaining the different types of infinity to Russell’s children at the tender age of 93.

Paul’s recollection rings true: “The one characteristic that Uncle Don showed me is contentment like the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11 (KJV). ‘Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.’ I am confident that now that he is with Christ his contentment is complete.”

Thanks to Holly Hall for thirteen good years, and condolences to those there that mourn him, including Ruby, Betty, Diana, and countless others.

Cremation arranged by Distinctive Life, Bellaire, Texas. Oklahoma arrangements by Moore Funeral & Cremation. Graveside services and interment 11:00 a.m., Saturday, November 15, at the Moore Cemetery, 800 SE 4th St., Moore, Oklahoma. Pizza buffet to follow at Mazzio’s, 160 12th Ave. SE, Norman, Oklahoma. Dutch treat, because that’s what Donald would have wanted.

Not one to let a teachable moment pass, Donald died on Pythagorean Triple Square Day. In lieu of flowers, look it up.

Fair winds and following seas, Uncle Donald.

Cemetery Details

Moore Cemetery

800 SE 4th St.
Moore, OK 73160

Previous Events

Graveside Service

NOV 15. 11:00 AM (CT)

Moore Cemetery
800 SE 4th St.
Moore, OK 73160