

Comment on “Personal history of Donald R. Nielsen relating to Soil Science and discussed with Ole Wendroth”

My assignment from the International Union of Soil Science to conduct an interview with Donald R. Nielsen, a well-known soil scientist, is a great honor for me. I am a scientist at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and my wife Kerstin and I met Don and Joanne Nielsen in August 1990 when Don became my mentor for two years in Davis, the beginning of a most wonderful friendship and fruitful professional interaction. The international community of soil scientists will benefit very much from reading Don’s memories from early childhood on, about his years in high school, his experiences at the university as a student and later as a faculty member and in many other functions lasting throughout his career and into his current stage of retirement. Our professional community is blessed with great soil scientists. Don is truly special. I testify first-hand that he has always been extremely challenging to those around him, never stopping at a point of comfort, always eager to move on, and permanently inspiring others to be creative and think out of the box. He shaped his work environment in a way that made those around him clearly understand that extreme dedication and hard work are necessary to deserve the status of a scientist. And after each intensive and challenging discussion on a hot topic where he would pound on anybody shaking peoples’ minds and their comfort, he would turn around and invite everybody for a good social time and to have friendly conversations with each other. Life can’t become much better than that. Behind almost every successful faculty member and global leader in soil science, there is a supportive spouse. Don’s and Joanne’s actions have been and are being nourished by their compassionate love for people. Indeed, they are people lovers – not merely people pleasers. They invest their energy and lives in helping other people and making friends across the globe. Such friendships last through Joanne’s letters that she keeps writing. Through their optimism and encouraging nature, Don and Joanne have always openly shared their own talents and strengths to help others accomplish needed tasks throughout the world. Their life is a unique mentorship – a manifestation of making the world better through loving respect among people and hard work.

Ole Wendroth