

EXTRACT FROM OP-SF NET

Topic #6 ----- OP-SF NET 19.1 ----- January 15, 2012

From: OP-SF NET Editors

Subject: Herbert S. Wilf 1931-2012

Herbert Wilf died on January 7. Some idea of the scope of his contributions to mathematics including our areas of interest can be gleaned from :

http://www.math.upenn.edu/History/obits/Herb_Wilf.html

George Andrews has provided us with the following tribute.

MY FRIEND, HERB WILF

Herb Wilf passed away on January 7, 2012. We who knew him will hugely miss him. He truly epitomized the phrase "Gentle Giant." He was wonderfully kind and generous. He was a grand and powerful mathematician, and he was probably the tallest mathematician I have known.

I first met him when I was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1960's. He had just been hired at Penn and was one of the youngest faculty members in the department. He was very helpful to me and many, many others throughout his career. I became most aware of his work when I was editing P. A. MacMahon's Collected Papers. Herb's 1968 paper, A mechanical counting method and combinatorial applications, showed me what powerful insights Herb brought to bear in his work on combinatorics.

Of course, he became most famous for being "W" in the WZ method (joint work with Doron Zeilberger). Both Herb and Doron won the Steele Prize in 1998. This was certainly a wonderful achievement, but it was only one chapter in the extensive and exciting collection of Herb Wilf's papers. Being a great mathematician is a great thing, and Herb was certainly that. Being a great human being is the greatest thing, and Herb was very much a great human being. We will all deeply miss this grand, many faceted, gentle giant.

George Andrews