

WARREN PIERS, FRSC

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**Edward Piers**  
**1938-2010**



Dr. Edward Piers, BSc 1959 (University of Alberta), PhD 1963 (University of Alberta), retired Professor of Chemistry passed away on July 18, 2010 in Calgary, Alberta at the age of 71 years. He was born in Neerlandia, Alberta, the fifth of seven children in a Dutch immigrant farming family.

Dr. Piers, known simply as “Ed” to his many friends, colleagues and students, moved to British Columbia after his doctorate and was a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Prof. James Kutney before he was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Chemistry at the University of British Columbia in 1965. He spent his entire career there before retiring at age 65; he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease a year later and spent his last years in Calgary, Alberta.

Ed’s research program in synthetic organic chemistry was world renowned and resulted in more than 190 scholarly publications. His group focused on the development of new methods and reagents for organic synthesis and applied these newly discovered tools for the total synthesis of challenging natural products and biologically active molecules. He was at the vanguard of the use of organometallic reagents for organic reactions, in particular the use of organocuprate reagents for conjugate addition reactions for the introduction of stereocentres into molecules. Later, Ed and his research group introduced a number of bi and trifunctional organogermane and organostannane reagents and used them in combination with copper or palladium compounds to bring about complex organic transformations. The Piers group ultimately developed routes to over 30 natural products, including palauolide,  $\Delta^{9(12)}$ -capnellene, 8-epi-oplopanone, and crinipellin B. Ed was an excellent speaker who was frequently an invited speaker at national and international conferences and Universities. He held several editorial advisory board positions including those for the *Canadian Journal of Chemistry*, the *Encyclopedia of Reagents for Organic Synthesis*, *Chemical Communications* and the *Journal of the Chemical Society, Perkin Transactions I*.

Over the years, 65 graduate students and 33 postdoctoral fellows passed through Ed’s research program. His mentoring skills were exemplary; he was always available to discuss chemistry and focused on helping students with problem solving strategies—and did so with patience and enthusiasm. As a result, many of his group members ended up in leadership positions in both academia and the pharmaceutical industry, leaving an indelible imprint on chemical research in Canada and internationally.

Ed’s outstanding contributions to both research and teaching—he was renowned as an excellent undergraduate lecturer—were recognized with a number of prestigious awards including the Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship (1970), The Chemical Institute of Canada (CIC) Merck, Sharpe and Dohme Award (1979), a Killam Senior Fellowship (1984), the UBC Killam Research Prize (1989), the Chemical Society of Canada (CSC) Bader Award for Organic Chemistry (1994), the CSC R. U. Lemieux Award for Organic Chemistry (1996) and the CIC Montreal Medal (1999). He was elected to Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada in 1989. He was also twice awarded the CIC Departmental Master Teaching Award (1972 and 1985) for his inspiring undergraduate teaching.

In addition to his impressive scholarly activities, Ed was a leader in the scientific community and made significant contributions to the profession of chemistry in Canada. He served on the NSERC Chemistry Grants Selection committee from 1982-1985, acting as its Chair in 1984-1985. He was highly active in the CSC, serving on the Executive committee of its Board of Directors as Vice President (1990-1991), President (1991-1992) and Immediate Past President (1992-1993). During this time he was instrumental in increasing the graduate student membership in the CSC. He was also active in the Royal Society, serving on the selection committee for the Rutherford Medal in Chemistry as both a member and the Chair, and was a member of the RSC Academy of Science Council Fellowship Review committee from 1992-1995.

Ed was also a committed Christian who was dedicated to integrating his faith with his vocation. He did not see faith and science as being in conflict, but rather as two “ways of knowing” that complemented each other. He served several Christian education institutions, from high schools, to colleges, to graduate schools, most often as the Chair of their Boards or Senate bodies. He was also a leader in the Christian Labour Association of Canada and was a valued member of their Board of Directors near the end of his professional life.

Although he did not have much spare time, outside of chemistry he enjoyed both playing and watching sports; he shot two holes in one in his golfing career, which is two more than most of us will have! In younger days, he was an excellent hockey player—not very tough, but a smart player who understood the game enough to utilize finesse effectively. He also enjoyed photography and hiking in the mountains, both the Coastal ranges and the Rockies.

Ed leaves behind his wife of 50 years, Shirley, two sons, six grandchildren, four brothers and his sister. He was predeceased by his parents and one brother. He will be missed by family, friends and colleagues—a true scholar and gentleman.

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*(Author's title given as of the time of writing)*