

## An Introduction to Leo Enright's Observing Logs

by David H. Levy

LEO ENRIGHT WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR MANY THINGS, but his many friends in the astronomical community will always treasure his love and passion for the night sky. He took that love seriously enough that he recorded all his observing sessions, an act which I consider to be a primary marker of a serious and committed observer of nature. "We become observers to see for ourselves the things of which we have read," Isabel K. Williamson wrote in November 1964. "If, in addition, we have the satisfaction of knowing that our observations are of some scientific value, that surely is in the nature of a bonus."

Leo's observing logs themselves are of value to science for they record the details of objects and events in the changing night sky over a lifetime. Leo's delight in the night sky was an ideal outlet for the logic of his powerful mind. He and I first met at Clubs Night at Queen's University at Kingston, on October 4, 1977, twenty years to the day after Sputnik entered history as Earth's first artificial satellite. At the time I wanted to transfer my RASC membership from Montreal to Kingston, and I was immediately impressed by his obvious appetite for observing. (I now hold memberships in both centres.) Back then, Leo was the editor of *Regulus*, the Kingston Centre's newsletter. He crammed his newsletter with many types of material that one would rarely find elsewhere. My favourite was "For your compendium of esoteric facts." Here I'd find such interesting tidbits as the "Milk Moon" which traditionally refers to the full Moon each May. Leo was a teacher whose lessons extended beyond the classroom; his joy at educating his colleagues about things like this was profound.

Leo was planning and building his observatory around the time I met him. At first, the sliding roof structure housed his 8-inch Celestron telescope. It seemed a cavernous building for a relatively small telescope. Some years later he replaced the 8 with a mighty 14-inch Celestron, a beautiful telescope which served him faithfully for the rest of his life. It was this telescope that showed him the Moon countless times, the planets and particularly the impact spots from the comet collision of 1994, as well as many comets and other exciting targets. However, he still kept his older 8-inch set up outside the observatory. With this telescope he indulged his taste for observing the Sun, drawing its sunspots as the solar cycles ebbed and flowed. I remember his speaking with me over the telephone, talking excitedly about his counts of sunspots. As he talked to me, Leo seemed to give the impression that the Sun sang to him. Galileo himself could have felt no greater thrill.

From the time I met Leo until his death decades later, I shared many observing sessions with him. And as esoteric as some of these sessions became, Leo never forgot to emphasize the basics. Of the many times I have had the honour of observing with Leo, two particular observing sessions stand out. The first took place at his home on Sharbot Lake, Ontario, about an hour's drive north of Kingston. At three o'clock on a frigid February morning, we shuffled out on the frozen lake and looked eastward to see the Great Comet of 1997. The comet's co-discoverer Tom

Bopp joined us that session. As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, it looked “like a shuttlecock at the height.”

The second session I remember vividly was the August 11, 1999 total eclipse of the Sun, which we witnessed aboard the cruise ship *Regal Empress*. The fifty second total phase took place shortly after sunrise, minutes after the shadow plunged downwards from heaven and enveloped us all in an unearthly hush. Watching with our wives, Denise Sabatini and Wendee Wallach-Levy, made the event even more special. There were two other observers with us on that memorable trip—Roy Bishop and his wife, Gertrude. They stood a few feet from me during the eclipse.

Later that day Leo and I discussed an observation I made in the hours before the crescent Sun rose in the east. I had located an object in the northeastern sky, which turned out to be an independent discovery of Comet Lee (C/1999 H1). Just a few hours before a total eclipse of the Sun, my pleasant quarter-hour getting acquainted with this comet added to the magic of that early morning.

In that same year, Leo spent time photographing Mars, not to learn about its physical properties but to study its motion back and forth among the stars of the constellations Libra and Virgo. These are simple photographs. They will not win prizes or be displayed on internet sites; those honours were of no real interest to Leo. But they clearly show the dance of this world about the Sun, and how it appears to become stationary in the sky, then move westward, and finally resume its eastward motion after the Earth has overtaken it. Leo had a knack for basic observational work; understanding aspects of the sky, how these aspects connect to our Earthly home, and then teaching these aspects to others.

Quite often Leo and I would enjoy telephone conversations across a continent about shared sessions involving lunar eclipses and meteor showers. Although he only visited my Arizona home once—in the spring of 1981—I enjoyed several visits to his lakeside home. Here we enjoyed some of Canada’s darkest nights. It was really a privilege to share these times with Leo. He could always fill my time with a unique story about one of the constellations, or some detail from the life story of a long-gone skygazer.

Leo is no longer with us. However, the records of his many happy nights under the sky will live on as long as there are people to read and savour them. Thanks to Randall Rosenfeld, the RASC archivist, and Walter MacDonald of the Kingston Centre, Leo’s observing records are now available for all to savour. Much more than a monument, these logs, and all the patience, data, and observing procedure they teach, will help to keep the spirit of Leo’s passion alive.