

Barry T. Kilbourn
1939-2003

What do you call someone who can answer almost any conceivable question and can put his hands on the supporting data within a few seconds? Some affectionately called him the Encyclopedia Britannica, acknowledging his English roots. Some called him “Mr. Rare Earth”, another well-deserved title. But most of us knew him simply as Barry Kilbourn.

Barry exuded an infectious enthusiasm for helping people use the rare earths, or lanthanides as he liked to call them. Anyone who had an idea about a new application would find a fast friend in Barry. If they needed practical information, samples or help with an idea, he was always eager to use his vast expertise to help potential customers. Or if someone wanted the most esoteric or theoretical information, he had that too, and would love to discuss resonance, spectra, color or any other phenomena with anyone interested.

There are two personal glimpses that I especially cherish.

At the Molycorp Christmas party in 1988, our office manager, Zita Campbell, hired a belly dancer. Like most belly dancers, she encouraged us to dance with her and produced a turban and other paraphernalia for us to wear. Completely uninhibited, Barry put on the turban and was immediately transformed. It appeared to all that he was born to be wearing the turban and dancing that night. He was a natural. For a long time, it was hard to see him without imagining that turban.

As a one-time serious runner, I was particularly impressed and interested when Barry mentioned in casual conversation that he saw Sir Roger Bannister run the first sub-four minute mile at Oxford in May of 1954. He explained that he went with several of his friends and they all ran out on the track together to celebrate Bannister’s historic feat. Barry’s only regret that day was that he

stayed at the back of the crowd and just the top of his head could be seen in a few of the pictures. One of his friends had the insight to run to the front of the crowd, just in front of Bannister, and appears prominently in most of the photographs.

A bright light in our industry is gone; we are very grateful to have known him. We extend our deepest sympathies to his wife Hans and daughter Kirsten, who also have suffered the loss of their daughter and sister, Annelisa, in a plane crash late last year.



Barry (second from the left) with Molycorp coworkers at White Plains, NY. (1990).



Barry (right) with Molycorp coworker at Mountain Pass, CA. (1998)

SRT
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