



# Christopher Kemp Sommerfield

October 14, 1964 - December 29, 2019

Dr. Christopher Kemp Sommerfield, age 55 of Lewes, DE, passed away on Sunday, December 29, 2019. He was born on October 14, 1964 in Bryn Mawr, PA, son of Beverly (DeCurtis) and the late Earle (Kip) Sommerfield.

Dr. Chris Sommerfield built his professional career at the University of Delaware starting in 2000 after receiving his doctorate at the Stony Brook University and finishing a Postdoctoral Scholarship at the U.S. Geological Survey and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Dr. Sommerfield's expertise was focused on coastal geological processes on the continental shelf, and in estuaries and tidal wetlands. He was keenly interested in the impacts of humans in estuaries and how these impacts address questions of ecosystem sustainability. His work importantly looked at the natural processes governing the thickness of marsh soils and the ability of these environments to take up atmospheric carbon. His findings are critical to the State of Delaware where almost a quarter of the State is tidal wetlands, and where global sea level rise is disproportionately impacting the Mid-Atlantic region. He recently co-authored an important report for the State of Delaware on planning scenarios for sea level rise. Dr. Sommerfield was a highly productive scientist with 55 publications and over 2,700 individual citations of his work. In recent recognition of his work, Dr. Sommerfield was the 2019 recipient of the Pritchard Award, which recognizes the author(s) of the best physical oceanography paper published in the respected journal *Estuaries and Coasts* within the past two years. He was an active member in five professional societies, contributed his knowledge at the federal, state and local levels of government, and actively served at all levels within the University of Delaware. In addition to the lasting legacy of Dr. Sommerfield's scientific research, perhaps his greatest professional contribution, and one that he would be most proud of, would be the hundreds of students he taught in the classroom and in the field, and the 15 graduate students he mentored. Although rigorous, he was thoughtful and caring, and was always earned the respect of his students. Chris was a highly valued colleague and friend of the faculty and staff of the University and will be profoundly missed.

Chris was a devoted son, father and husband who loved sharing his passion for the water

through scuba diving and his love of guitar and music with his boys. His sense of honor and discipline to his work and family and his ability to see the good in everyone he met will forever serve as an inspiration to his children, family, friends, and colleagues.

In addition to his father, Chris was preceded in death by his grandparents: Earle and Larue Sommerfield and Alfred and Elizabeth De Curtis. He is survived by his beloved family: his wife, Beth; his children: Davis, Richard, and John; his mother, Beverly; his brother, Jeff (Christina); his sister, Jennifer; and his many nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

UPDATE: The Celebration of Life scheduled for March 21, 2020 at Barnaby's, 15 South High Street, West Chester, PA has been CANCELLED and will be RESCHEDULED at a later date. Please check back periodically on this tribute page for rescheduling information. Interment will be private.

Please sign the online guestbook located on the tribute page.

# Comments

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“ I was a member of the PhD dissertation committee for Chris when he was finishing his research at SUNY Stony Brook. He was a brilliant scientist and I valued his comments on my research on the California continental shelf. He will be missed by me and by the oceanography community. Rest In Peace Chris, but please send us messages on how to do better research and take better care of the Earth.

Dave Drake

David Drake - September 03, 2021 at 06:09 PM

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“ A test. I would like to send a family folder of correspondences to the Sommerfield family members. Would an address be available of them in your files?

Thank you  
Roger Rumenik  
rprumenik@comcast.net  
850 445-6665 c

Roger Rumenik - March 03, 2021 at 12:47 PM

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“ 10 files added to the album Chris on the Hudson



Rocky Geyer - March 09, 2020 at 11:09 AM



“ Thanks for posting these Rocky! It's great to see Chris in his element. :-)

Jennifer Sommerfield - March 10, 2020 at 02:32 PM

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“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



**Dave Walsh** - January 22, 2020 at 01:57 PM



“ Took me a while to find these, but I wanted to share with Chris's family... I have such great memories of my time spent with Chris and the entire Sommerfield family. My deepest sympathies are with you. - Dave Walsh

**Dave Walsh** - January 22, 2020 at 02:02 PM



“ Thanks for sharing these Dave!! - Jennifer Sommerfield

**Jennifer Sommerfield** - March 10, 2020 at 02:31 PM

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“ My wonderful nephew. I will love and think about you always.  
Love forever,  
Auntie Sue xo

**Sue Braderman** - January 19, 2020 at 01:34 PM

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“ Chris and Beth instantly became life long friends after meeting on the beach with our dogs and Chris recognizing a colleague who was with us. After a party that night we shared many dinners at local restaurants and at each other's houses. My husband and I are both musicians, but we always found so much to share. His smile and genuine good hearted ness will be sorely missed. For Beth, Davis, Richard, and Jack I hope good memories will sustain you at this time. Thinking of you always.  
Sylvia Ahranjian

**sylvia Ahranjian** - January 19, 2020 at 01:28 PM

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“ I'm incredibly saddened to lose Chris as a cherished mentor. Even though I was not his student, he was always friendly and supportive, lending his time and attention freely to my scientific or personal questions. Even when I made mistakes on the field with his equipment, he was generous and patient, and always made way for a learning experience. His curiosity went beyond science -- it always went to people. It was always fun talking about Korea and my future career aspirations with him. When I was struggling with the culture of academia he sat down and offered valuable advice that I still ground myself on in my daily grind. He sent me the photo of beach groundwater when he saw it taking a walk and his scientific joy was such an inspiration. This photo is still often used in my presentations and talks. I hope his scientific legacy lives long. The other photo is one of many moments when he taught me how to do something in lab. Rest easy Chris, we all miss you here already but we will remember you.



**Kyra Kim** - January 17, 2020 at 09:39 PM

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“ Our family was shaken by this news! Everytime we saw Chris, he was always gentle and kind! My heart breaks for his beautiful sons, strong wife, and the rest of the grieving family. May God bring you peace.

**Heather Sekela** - January 16, 2020 at 10:49 PM

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“ My deepest condolences to Beth, Davis, Richard and Jack. We shared wonderful family get togethers in our neighborhood, The Nesbit Station, including dinners together, beaching it for the day, St Judes, our local church, and Chris taking time out of his very demanding schedule to come to our pool and share with the neighborhood boys his scuba skills with all of his gear. So blessed to have this family in our lives. He will truly be missed by all.



**Lucille** - January 16, 2020 at 08:26 AM



“ The world has truly lost a great scientist teacher, father and friend. I have so many fond memories of not only interacting with Chris as a scientist, but also chatting with him about life, scuba diving, our dogs, and his sons. I could always count on him for an interesting chat over beers at happy hours. I'm saddened that we never had the opportunity to go on the many dive trips with Richard and other colleagues we always said we should do. He once shared a photo of this sand tiger shark he took while scuba diving in NC with me, which I went on to use multiple times in presentations and publications. I'm thankful for his kindness and his mentorship. Rest easy.



**Danielle Haulsee** - January 16, 2020 at 01:22 AM

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“ My sincere condolences to the Sommerfield family. I grew up with Chris and Beth's sons, Davis and Richard. I can't imagine what you all are going through right now. I will be praying for you all.

**Shane** - January 14, 2020 at 02:40 PM

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“ Chris was my master's advisor from 2008 to 2010. I learned an incredible amount under his tutelage and I appreciated most his ability to guide students through the hurdles they encountered during their research without being patronizing. Outside of the lab, he organized two SCUBA diving trips with myself and another student. Included is a photo from one of those trips to Dutch Springs Quarry, where it was raining cats and dogs but we didn't care! I will miss him.



**Dack Stuart** - January 14, 2020 at 01:17 PM

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“ I was co-author with Chris on the latest SLR report for the state of Delaware. Chris had a larger impact on that report than he may have thought. He taught me much about tidal salt marshes and their dynamics to coastal flooding and SLR. Particularly about our report, his questions about the data and constructive criticisms really helped me to think more critically about the integrity of the report. I have a lot of respect for his work. Was looking forward to talking with him about his latest research in the marsh and what that would mean for our state's future resiliency. He will be missed.

**John Callahan** - January 13, 2020 at 02:55 PM

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“ I'm deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to work closely with Chris over the last 10 years. Chris was an influential mentor on my academic path - he was on my PhD thesis committee, coauthored 3 papers, and helped guide me through career transitions. We spent a lot of time in the field together, and he went out of his way to teach me how to plan and lead a research cruise. Chris was a rigorous scientist, and such a thoughtful and kind person. I learned so much from him and feel honored to call him a friend. I will sorely miss him. My heart goes out to his family and loved ones during this sad time.



**Jack McSweeney** - January 13, 2020 at 12:45 PM

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“ We keep Chris and his family in our thoughts daily through this tough time and as we move forward. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

Jeff and I are saddened as we think back to special occasions with Chris. We are thankful he got to meet Autumn and laugh through tears as we picture him playing hide and seek with Braxton throughout our home. Aunt Bev, Jen, Jeff, the boys, and to Chris' entire tribe- our thoughts and prayers are with you. “And the peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7

With love, Jeff, Heather, Braxton, and Autumn



**Heather** - January 13, 2020 at 06:23 AM



“ Heather, I love this!! Thank you. Love, Aunt Bev

**Bev Sommerfield** - January 13, 2020 at 01:46 PM

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“ Chris was a great colleague that worked hard for his students, and always brought a level-headed perspective that helped us all out. He will be greatly missed! My sincere condolences to his family.

**Matthew Oliver** - January 12, 2020 at 09:07 PM

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“ Thanks for supporting me during a tough time in graduate school, Chris. You helped make it happen and influenced the person I became today. I wish I could have told you that I will be Captain of a NOAA ship in April 2021.



**Olivia Hauser** - January 12, 2020 at 03:01 PM

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“ Chris was co-pi on a series of Delaware Estuary research cruises I participated in during my Master's. The R/V Hugh Sharp became my second home, with a close family of students and professors, including Chris. Chris was a passionate and thoughtful scientist and fostered curiosity and wonder in his students. Everyone around Chris gained a newfound appreciation for mud! He will be dearly missed.



Anna Hermes - January 11, 2020 at 11:42 PM

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“ My sincere condolences to the family. Chris was a rigorous and passionate scientist. He served in my student's committee and we coauthored a good publication. I wish I could have known him better. He will be deeply missed. -Wei-Jun Cai

Wei-Jun Cai - January 11, 2020 at 08:08 AM

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“ Chris was a kind, thoughtful, warm human being. He was a joy to work with and to have as a freind. His force with be missed in the School. The world could use more like him. My heart goes our to his family. RIP my friend.

George P - January 10, 2020 at 04:45 PM

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“ My heart goes out to Beth, the boys, and all of those who loved and were touched by Chris. We were in graduate school together - Chris was always such a solid citizen, kind, with a remarkable laugh and smile. The world has lost a fine marine geologist, husband, brother and father... XO

sarah griscom - January 10, 2020 at 04:36 PM

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“ My sincere condolences to the family. Chris was a committed and passionate educator and researcher. He will be sorely missed.

Thomas Hanson - January 10, 2020 at 01:25 PM



“ I first met Chris as a master's degree student in geology at UDel, and I then went on to study under him for my PhD. He was an excellent research mentor, and got me off to a good start on my academic career. Requiescat in pace.

**Susanne Moskalski** - January 10, 2020 at 11:27 AM

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“ Connie Edwards lit a candle in memory of Christopher Kemp Sommerfield



**Connie Edwards** - January 10, 2020 at 12:13 AM



“ So sad to hear of the passing of Dr. Sommerfield. Worked with him for several years at the University of Delaware, Lewes Campus.

**Connie Edwards** - January 10, 2020 at 12:17 AM

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“ With Our Deepest Sympathy Gift Basket was purchased for the family of Christopher Kemp Sommerfield.



January 09, 2020 at 03:16 PM

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“ Our college has lost a great faculty, colleague, and friend. Chris was always willing to serve and give a helping hand. My condolences to his family and may his soul rest in eternal peace.

Estella Atekwana

**ESTELLA ATEKWANA** - January 09, 2020 at 03:15 AM



“ I am proud to consider myself as one of Chris' friends and colleagues. He was smart, hard-working, and gracious. My deepest sympathies to his loved ones.

**Christopher Sherwood** - January 08, 2020 at 01:34 PM

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“ Chris and I sailed on several research cruises together in the late 1990s, working with the USGS offshore of Southern California. He was a good man and good colleague. He will be missed. My condolences to his family.

**Walter Barnhardt** - January 08, 2020 at 12:54 PM

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“ Oh my gosh- I'm trying to gather my thoughts as I process this news. Chris was a warm, friendly colleague and pal during his time in Woods Hole. An amazing scientist and hard worker! What a loss- my heart goes to his family!!

**Ellen Mecray** - January 08, 2020 at 11:24 AM

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“ I met Chris doing an undergraduate research experience in Lewes, for which he was my advisor. He went on to become my research advisor for a senior thesis project and really introduced me into the world of coastal science research, an interested that has come to define my career and life since. I loved working with Chris and my very favorite times were cruising up and down the Delaware Bay collecting samples - - he was completely in his element. I thank him so much for all he did for me, and surely for countless other students whome he gratefully shared his time and mind with.



**Josh Humberston** - January 08, 2020 at 11:01 AM

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“ I had the great pleasure of working with Chris since February 2014. What a curious and thoughtful scientist he was, with a tremendous work ethic, always aspiring to solve the most challenging of environmental mysteries. But what I will remember most about Chris is the deep love he expressed for his family. He spoke of you so often. My deep condolences, Kim D. Desrosiers, FTI Consulting

**Kim Desrosiers** - January 07, 2020 at 09:52 PM

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“ My memories of my oldest cousin Chris all involve the ocean, the beach, his smile and soothing demeanor. Wishing peace to all.

Stephanie Seiberg



**Stephanie Seiberg** - January 07, 2020 at 09:32 PM

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“ Chris was well-known and well-respected. I know my FWS colleagues in DE were so appreciative of his insights and help. He will be greatly missed.

**Susan C Adamowicz, Wells, ME; NEERS Pres** - January 07, 2020 at 05:19 PM

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“ Chris was a wonderful colleague and scientist! He will be missed.

David Velinsky and Roger Thomas



David Velinsky - January 07, 2020 at 08:48 AM



“ David & Roger, as Chris's sister I am sure I speak for our entire family when I say...Thank you for posting these pictures of Chris. I love seeing him in his "element" doing what he so very much enjoyed.

Jennifer Sommerfield - January 07, 2020 at 03:03 PM

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“ Chris was a great colleague and passionate educator. I enjoyed teaching with him and he was always helpful to our students. May his memory be eternal. Peace.



Art Trembanis - January 06, 2020 at 03:33 PM

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“ Chris was a fantastic colleague and a great person. He is sorely missed.

Jennifer Biddle - January 06, 2020 at 03:15 PM

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“ His smile could light up a room. An amazing friend first, and a brother in law second.



**Christina Sommerfield** - January 04, 2020 at 08:49 PM

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“ So sorry to hear this news! I enjoyed working with Chris as a research partner. He will be greatly missed by the USFWS staff at Prime Hook NWR!

**Susan Guiteras** - January 03, 2020 at 10:52 PM

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“ Susan Guiteras lit a candle in memory of Christopher Kemp Sommerfield



**Susan Guiteras** - January 03, 2020 at 10:43 PM



“ So sorry to hear this news! I enjoyed working with Chris as a research partner. He will be greatly missed by the USFWS staff at Prime Hook NWR!

**Susan** - January 03, 2020 at 10:44 PM

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“ Julie Tigue lit a candle in memory of Christopher Kemp Sommerfield



**Julie Tigue** - January 03, 2020 at 10:10 PM



“ So very sorry to hear of Chris's death. I worked with him for several years at UD, College of Marine Studies. Rest In Peace Chris.

**Julie Tigue** - January 03, 2020 at 10:47 PM



“ I worked with Chris on several cruises and projects and got to know him as both a student and as a young professional. Chris was so bright and insightful and a rising star in our field. It is such a shock to lose him at such a young age. I considered him a friend and colleague and will miss him a lot.

**Homa Lee** - January 09, 2020 at 02:45 PM



“ Condolences to Chris's friends and family. I am sorry for your tremendous loss.

**Kelly** - January 11, 2020 at 10:34 AM