

Members of the *Immunohematology* Editorial Board who knew Sandy Ellisor submitted the following memoirs:

### Memories of Sandy Ellisor in Her Early Career

Sandy was one of my first SBB students. I came to San Francisco in August 1968, and even though not working at the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank, I soon got involved in teaching in the SBB program. I vividly remember Sandy as one of the brightest students; she graduated in 1971. My associations with Sandy continued throughout her career. After graduating, Sandy took a job in Oxnard, California, with the Reference Lab at Spectra Biologicals. Peter Issitt had worked there previously, and he wrote the first edition of *Applied Blood Group Serology* (published in 1970) there.

Once again, I had close contact with Sandy. The supervisor of the reference lab had a terrible fatal accident on the way home from work, and Spectra asked me if I could come down from San Francisco, once a month, to review the reference lab cases and provide continuing education (e.g., a lecture) to their staff. I had a chance, once again, to appreciate Sandy's technical expertise and to get to know her better at a personal level. Among many, many students, Sandy stands out in my memory, both technically and personally (who could forget that laugh). I was able to continue my close contact with Sandy when she moved back to Northern California in 1974 to join the Red Cross in San Jose (together with Marion Reid). Coincidentally, in 1978 I moved to join the Red Cross in Los Angeles and have lived there ever since, quite near Oxnard; it brings back memories every time I pass the little Oxnard airport where Sandy used to pick me up.

I was going through my files of reprints last week and came across a reprint, "Action and Application of Enzymes in Immunohematology," from "A Seminar in Antigen-Antibody Reactions Revisited," AABB 1982, by Sandra Ellisor. I had invited Sandy to give this talk at the Annual Seminar that was built around the Emily Cooley Award lecture (Ed Steane); there was an audience of approximately 2,000, a daunting task

for anyone. Sandy had written on the front of the reprint, "George, this was a marvelous day for me! Best Wishes, Love Sandy." The 40-page review is a tour de force and I still give it to our SBB students to read; Sandy had come a long way from the young student I first encountered in 1970.

As Delores Mallory mentioned in her obituary, Sandy went on to have a varied and interesting career. She was widely respected for her expertise in many areas, but my most vivid memories are of the cocoon changing into a butterfly in the 1970s and 1980s (I can hear Sandy's guffaw from here)!

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It was her laugh. It was distinctive. It was more than a response to humor; it was a response to life itself. It could fill the largest room and be clear as a bell to all present. It was extremely distinctive and you would know instantly that Sandy was present. When you saw her, the first sight was always of a big, toothy smile causing her round cheeks to redden and causing her to squint her eyes; she even laughed with her eyes. She brought life with her wherever she went.

I met Sandra (Sandy) Ellisor at the first AABB Reference Laboratory Conference we both attended. As a couple of the neophytes in a room of renowned and prominent blood grouping serologists of the time we were bonded by similar circumstances, interests, and experiences; a strong interest in red cell serology; and the challenge of resolution of complex serological problems. While our employers, job titles, and responsibilities changed over the following 37 years,

she was just as faithful to her original professional purpose, quality performance and dissemination of information on methods of red cell serology and the valued services of blood banking, as she was when I first met her.

I have many fond memories of Sandy. One of the several that emphasized her humor to me occurred as various members of the assembled reference laboratories mentioned above were to depart to their homes following the meeting. Sandy and I both were in the same airport terminal area before our departure; mine to Minneapolis and Sandy to Oxnard via Louisiana. In addition to her luggage, which she had checked as baggage, she was carrying a liquid nitrogen transfer container containing frozen red cell samples. (The conference had been a "wet workshop" where participants brought unusual samples for further investigation and peer-review comments.) The container was about a 6 by 18 inch cylinder with a metal carrying handle. It was white with a small label that said "Cryogenic Carrier." While we were waiting I had written on it "Human Semen Samples" and we debated if anybody would stop and ask her about the strange container. Later she confirmed that she had boldly carried it all the way to Oxnard and nobody asked her anything about the container or its contents. Needless to say, that was at a time of less restriction of materials carried on planes.

Sandy was just as capable of practical jokes. When she heard I was interested in looking at the protectins in snails and slugs, she sent me several large banana slugs she had collected while on one of her hiking trips. The smell of the freshly opened nonrefrigerated container of 4-day-old dead slugs influenced my limiting and eventual abandonment of any further studies into snail and slug protectins. Unknowingly, Sandy has saved dozens of my fellow workers from having to endure messy extraction procedures and odoriferous concoctions looking for various hemagglutinins and for that I am sure they are all eternally thankful.

While her overall contributions to the profession of serology, transfusion, and blood banking are numerous and noteworthy I know that that is recorded elsewhere. For me, I want to acknowledge and always remember the woman; a capable, ingenious, hard-working, and living life to the fullest friend. She truly gave much more than she took.

And to me, she gave the memory of her laugh,

her smile, and being. It's a memory that I will always cherish.

Sandy, we all miss you.

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Sandy Ellisor was a warm, loving, generous person whose personality was tempered with a healthy measure of cynicism and underscored by her famous laugh. For me, she was a very important part of my settling in the USA in 1990 when she lived in Baltimore, just a 45-minute drive from the Holland Laboratory in Rockville and its environs, to which I had moved from England. Marion Reid had "introduced" me to Sandy. Marion was living in Oxford at the time, and when I decided to move, she told me to look Sandy up and that Sandy would help with anything. I'm not sure she had told Sandy that but I never found out or even asked! Sandy was indeed generous. When she and her Mom spent a rainy two weeks in England, I house-sat for her, commuting from Baltimore to Rockville for one week and working as a guest in the ARC Baltimore Reference Laboratory for the second week. I looked after her two cats, drank beer on her back porch in the evenings, and enjoyed being a part of downtown Baltimore. She lent me her car during that period and I took my Maryland driver's test, making me a legitimate right-hand-side driver!

Several memories stick out from that time. Eating Maryland crabs is a strong one. Delores Mallory, Deanna Fujita (who worked for the HLA Lab in the Holland Laboratory), Peter Byrne, and I would drive up to Baltimore to eat crabs with Sandy. The first time, she gave a demonstration to the uninitiated on how to break open a crab and what to eat (and she ate more of the crab than most) and then launched into them. She could eat crabs, talk, and laugh faster than anyone I've met since. It was always a fun evening. Another great set of memories are the weekends we used to go to Cape May in New Jersey to go birding with Polly Crawford. As an aside, Polly and many members of her family were In(Lu) types of the Lu(a-b-) phenotype. She would have been delighted to know that the molecular basis for the phenotype has been recently discovered, and it is the

first example of a mutation in a transcription factor that leads to a blood group phenotype.<sup>1</sup> Quite aside from her rare blood group, Polly was an avid birder and had a family home in Cape May. Groups of us, which always included Sandy, used to go for the weekend during the migratory season and look at the lovely ducks, starting at the crack of dawn. I did not admit these weekends to my friends in England—"twitching," as it's called there, is a very nerdy thing to do—however, those weekends were great fun and I can still name most ducks to this day.

Professionally, Sandy and I never worked together; however, she was always a great sounding board for both frustrations and ideas, especially in my "early" years but also later when we didn't meet so often. She provided encouragement and a sound opinion whenever I needed one. She was a great model in that she would try anything and try hard to make it work and I loved her optimism. I continue to miss her and know that I am one of many.

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#### Reference

1. Singleton BK, Burton NM, Green C, Brady RL, Anstee DJ. Mutations in *EKLF/KLF1* form the molecular basis of the rare blood group In(Lu) phenotype. *Blood* 2008 e-pub ahead of print.

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I was extremely fortunate to have known Sandy Ellisor. As a teacher, committee member, and work associate, she influenced me in many ways, all of them with positive impact on my personal development and professional career.

I first met Sandy as a transfusion medicine fellow at what was then the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank in San Francisco, now known as the Blood Centers of the Pacific. Through her lectures at Irwin and presentations at the California Blood Bank System annual meeting, she became one of my earliest and best influences in immunohematology. She had a unique ability to emphasize what was important rather than to intimidate us with irrelevant detail.

I was fortunate to serve with Sandy as a member of the Scientific Section Coordinating Committee of the AABB. I had left California and taken my current position at Johns Hopkins at that time, but I had also

recently accepted the directorship of the Chesapeake Region of American Red Cross Blood Services. One of my immediate goals and challenges was to change the ARC in Baltimore to emphasize customer focus and education. During a casual conversation with Sandy, I learned that she was willing to consider leaving paradise in California for new professional challenges in our Maryland paradise #2. I offered her a chance to come to Baltimore, and I have been eternally grateful that she accepted that challenge.

She began as our reference and education director and grew to positions of greater responsibility, managing all of our laboratory activities. These were the times of early turbulence in blood center management, with the AIDS epidemic, blood center consolidations, and heightened regulatory scrutiny by the FDA and other agencies, compounded by complicated management interactions in the ARC. Sandy led us through implementation of testing for HIV, HTLV, and HCV. When ARC national headquarters decided to close the Washington region and transfer most of the activity to Baltimore, leading us to form the Greater Chesapeake and Potomac Region, she enabled us to handle the major growing pains without undue distress. The hospitals and patients of the region owe Sandy a tremendous debt of gratitude for helping us transform the region at those difficult and challenging times.

When she and I left ARC, we remained in contact and interacted on consultative activities when she was at Ortho and later while working for her own business. I continued to learn many lessons from Sandy, always respecting her advice and welcoming her friendship. I miss Sandy and regret that I can no longer pick up the phone to seek her advice, but memories of her can-do attitude, sound and logical thinking, and enthusiasm for life will never leave me.

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#### Sandy Ellisor: A Remembrance

As this issue of *Immunohematology* is dedicated to Sandy Ellisor and contains an obituary, I chose to share some of my personal thoughts about this special person.

I first met Sandy in 1972, and what became immediately apparent was her trust and generosity to other

people, even strangers. For instance, after I drove across the USA for 3 months with a friend, we arrived with no place to stay and very little money—the day before Sandy traveled to Washington, DC, to attend the ISBT/AABB meeting. Without a second thought, Sandy left the keys to her apartment and car for us to use while she was away! Another example occurred several years later when I spoke with a colleague who was apprehensive about moving from England to the USA; without hesitation or reservation, I said, “If you need anything, just ask Sandy Ellisor.”

We worked together in the Consultation Laboratory at Spectra Biologicals in Oxnard, California, and later in the Reference Laboratory at the Central California American Red Cross facility in San Jose. There Sandy was instrumental in running an active antibody club, and she developed and maintained an SBB school. Many graduates of the SBB school became successful immunohematologists and have continued to contribute to our field of medical technology, just as Sandy did.

Pertinent to the journal *Immunohematology* is the fact that Sandy (together with Helen Glidden and me) started its predecessor, a newsletter called *The Red Cell Free Press*. This newsletter was intended to be written by reference folk for reference folk, and it served that role for several years. Thus, it is a fitting tribute to Sandy that this issue of *Immunohematology* is dedicated to her legacy.

On the personal level, Sandy’s family (sisters Margaret and Elizabeth and mother Ruth) were equally hospitable. Their warm reception made me reluctant to follow my initial plan of traveling around the world before returning to England to work as a medical technologist. Sandy believed in my abilities more than I believed in myself, and she encouraged me to report unusual findings and to speak in public (which was something I had resisted for years). Sandy’s belief in me is something I shall forever remember and cherish. In fact this was a major contributing factor in my career development as an immunohematologist.

I certainly was not the only one who benefited from Sandy’s warmth, generosity, and heart of gold. More than most of us appreciate, I believe that she

helped many people to achieve goals that were far beyond their wildest dreams. It is impossible for me to convey in simple sentences and paragraphs the essence of Sandy or the extent to which she helped others. Below are a few haiku in which I have tried to impart some of the essence of who Sandy was and what she stood for.

Colleague, coworker,  
encourager, teacher, mentor  
supporter and friend

Ran SBB school  
Happy to mentor students  
Freely shared knowledge

Happy-go-lucky,  
optimistic, free spirit,  
goal-oriented

To be included,  
she would say, “Me too, me too!”  
Enthusiastic

Most infectious laugh;  
easy to find in a crowd!  
Brought smiles to many

Supported causes;  
helped whenever she saw need.  
So compassionate

Love for out-of-doors;  
backpacking, camping, hiking,  
Yosemite peace

Travel, reading, cats,  
bird watching, photography,  
compliance, QC

Philosophy of  
life: live, love, and laugh; you will  
be dead long enough!

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