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# Personal Snapshots of the Early Years

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## Personal Snapshots of the Early Years By Richard A. McFeely, V'61

As a teenager working on a Bucks County dairy farm I was taken to visit the original Bolton Farm. My chief memory was of horse stalls in the old barn that were completely screened from insects. This was part of a research project on equine infectious anemia and although I didn't realize it at the time, it helped to whet my appetite for veterinary medical research.

My first trip to New Bolton Center was in the fall of 1957 as a freshman student. As part of Dr. Tom DeMott's class in animal husbandry we were actually going out to see some real chickens instead of learning the various breeds from photographs. Up to that point recognition was based on what the birds were doing in the photograph rather than what they looked like. Fifty years later I still remember that white Wyandotts had two standing and one pecking. We learned how to bleed chickens that afternoon. It was the first and last time I ever did it.

As senior students, we spent two six week blocks at the Center. We lived dormitory style in what was to become the VIP suite of the Allam House. Dr Boucher commuted daily

from his home in Media and woe be it to the student who wasn't hard at patient care when he walked into the barn in the morning. My group of eight was made up primarily of veterans who were slightly less intimidated by the "Big B" than some of our classmates. We soon learned that we could linger over coffee if we posted a lookout in the dormitory with a view of the main gate. When Dr Boucher's Rambler appeared at the entrance, the alarm was sounded and a short dash across the lawn assured us of being "in place" on time.

During these NBC blocks, two students were assigned to weekend duty. While during the week faculty, staff and students, ate lunch together in the lower dining room, no service was available on the weekends. However, food was left in a refrigerator and could be cooked on a hot plate. Most chose to revert to more primitive times and many a steak was cooked over the open fire in the huge fireplace in the log room. Beverages were kept cool in the large copper kettle, which hangs in one end of the room. While memory tells me that it was filled with sodas and lemonade, I could be mistaken

about this. I remember that lunches were usually soup and a sandwich and the cost was \$0.35.

There was also an unlimited supply of peanut butter and jelly,

When I returned to NBC on a full-time basis as a post-doc in the mid 60's, things had changed. The hospital was in full swing and there was now a dormitory and a proper cafeteria. In an attempt at self-improvement, the younger interns, residents, graduate students and post-docs met periodically to discuss a predetermined subject, often with a senior faculty discussion leader. As noble as these efforts were, not infrequently the discussion turned to a complaint session. The group called itself the Mushroom Club because we claimed to be kept in the dark and fed nothing but horse manure.

In the late 1960's the Section of Clinical Reproduction had acquired a Holsteiner stallion named Herkules as a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Philip Hofmann. Dean Allam had also convinced Mr. Hofmann to provide a stable for Herkules. It soon became evident that an addition to the stable including a clinic hall, labora-

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would come to know that Bill simply distrusted people whom he thought aspired to administrative positions, to exercise control over others.

I can't exactly say when I began to appreciate that Bill's presence was a formidable asset, and that just beneath the surface of his stern, independent, somewhat intimidating demeanor was a truly kindred spirit. I discovered that we shared many ideas about clinical education, and that Bill was inflexibly attached to first principles. Because he was so deeply respected, his unstinting support, for what at the time was perceived by some as my radical agenda, helped to assure its acceptance and ultimate success. For a School and profession in transition, Bill served as a bridge between two eras. A clinician whose exceptional diagnostic skills were based in the main on accurate history taking and thorough physical examination, he nevertheless wholeheartedly embraced and promoted the shift to a more science-based curriculum, and he shared my passion for developing clinical specialties and for training more veterinarian-scientists.

As one of the School's most revered teachers, Bill transformed the outlook, and sometimes the lives, of many who came under his influence. In his celebrated Saturday morning Grand Rounds, which regularly attracted stu-

dents from all four classes, the discourse was intense and exciting. With everyone focused on the patient, Bill's rounds had a compelling real life quality that students loved. Student presenters knew that nothing but the best was expected of them, that Bill sought imaginative ideas as well as practical knowledge. And though he never allowed himself to ridicule the weaker among them, he was quick to show his distaste for the slothful or the bogus. On occasion, when a student or clinician he disliked tripped-up in rounds, something akin to a smile would brighten his countenance like a blue light in a refrigerator.

One of our fondest dreams for New Bolton Center, so distant from Penn's main campus, and sometimes succumbing to a them-against-us field station mentality, was a greater basic science presence. Bill shared my conviction that clinicians would benefit from a richer intellectual environment and would welcome ready access to the latest techniques and equipment, and to opportunities for collaboration so readily available to their clinical colleagues in our Philadelphia. I had hoped that the Comparative Retrovirus Research Unit, where Dr. Jorge Ferrer, a brilliant tumor immunologist, and his colleagues were unraveling the mysteries of the bovine leukemia virus system, would provide a

model for such collaboration. For many reasons this never quite worked out, but I am heartened, as I know Bill would have been, by the presence at New Bolton of a thriving Center for Animal Transgenesis and Germ Cell Research, directed by Dr. Hans Schöler, and also by the numbers of clinical faculty – Dean Richardson, Tom Parsons and Ray Sweeney are good examples – whose rigorous scientific training has established them as productive independent investigators.

Throughout our years together as faculty colleagues, Bill had remained self-sufficient, proudly independent. So when he called it quits, suffering from steadily worsening Parkinson's, I wondered how well he would endure the sudden silence of retirement. He rejected my plea to continue his famous bull sessions with students and to accept a modest stipend. He wouldn't hear of it, nor would he state clearly his reasons for refusing. But reading between the lines, I'm sure he believed that the School wouldn't be getting its money's worth. He refused to compromise his rigorous standards, however slightly, despite the certain knowledge that, as his disease progressed, his financial circumstances would worsen.

This imperfect tribute to Bill calls to mind a remark he made to me after we had attended

tory, office and breeding shed was essential. Mr. Hofmann again came through with the funds. In order to save money, Dean Allam appointed me to design the facility, put it out for bids and oversee the project. As it had to be a union shop doing the construction, the building was built from plans drawn on a poster board with a magic marker by a local asphalt paving contractor who also happened to employ a couple of carpenters. Thanks to the dedication and common sense of all the contractors and subs who worked on the project, it came in on time, on budget and, most importantly, it functioned as intended – surely a first in my experience with a University construction project. I can't imagine a



**Dr. Robert Eckroade.**

dean getting away with that today.

As August of 1977 approached, several of us decided to have a 25th Anniversary party and invite our neighbors and local merchants and trades people who had served us so well during our first quarter century. A chicken barbecue was planned. Dr. Bob Eckroade, poultry pathologist, was placed in charge of the food with the caveat that we could not use chickens from his laboratory. Barry Haines and his maintenance crew built the barbecue pit, Bill Garmon constructed the three racks used in cooking the birds and Leroy Bruce and others made up the invitation list. Courtney Michener who supplied our fertilizer agreed to bring his barber-shop quartet and provide

entertainment. A 4' by 8' cake was made and decorated with many scenes from around the Center. All was proceeding well until about an hour before the party was to begin. At that point a sudden storm blew up and the heavens opened up. Despite efforts to circle the fire with hay wagons and draping tarps, the fire was extinguished. Water accumulated in the parking lot outside the cafeteria that was knee deep at one point. In my 39 years at the University, I have never seen as much rain before or since. However, we finished the chicken in the ovens, the cake somehow got moved undercover and everyone got fed in good order. As we finished dinner, the sun came out, the water receded, the music played and the singers sang. The party was considered to be a great success. The legacy of that day – the barbecue pit – remains as an important center of social activities, although it now has a permanent roof. No one knows exactly how many chickens have been cooked over that pit but it certainly exceeds 10,000 and the number continues to grow.

some particularly interesting case presentations at the Medical School. Reflecting on their complexity and on what he regarded as the then relatively primitive state of large animal practice, he said something like, I spend all of my days pursuing a goal that is always receding. And so indeed he did, this wholly civilized, good, and scrupulous man.

The transformation of New Bolton Center from impoverished country club to world leader in a mere five decades did not come easily. Costly mistakes were made along the way, insufficient funding was a chronic problem, and tough decisions sometimes had unpleasant unforeseen consequences.

My decision to abandon the private practitioner preceptor program in favor of an independent school-based Field Service was made when it was clearly evident that the referral system, at approximately one case per week, would never provide sufficient animals for teaching or research. Moreover, the system surrendered control of the students' clinical training – a fundamental faculty responsibility – to practitioners with no supervision or oversight. The decision did not go down well with a few local practitioners who, in a stormy meeting, denounced the School administration as an enemy of private enterprise who aimed to run

them out of business. One practitioner actually lobbied in Harrisburg to deny us our small, but critically important, State appropriation. When after many months things quieted down, it was apparent that no local veterinarian lacked in clientele. Indeed, new practitioners moved into the area, enjoying the advantages of New Bolton Center's many accessible resources.

There were other painful episodes, as when Dr. Robert Kenney, a man of immense integrity and one of the nation's most distinguished specialists in theriogenology – that ghastly arcane word for the veterinary equivalent of obstetrics/gynecology – having invested heavily in the training and subsequent appointment to the staff of two recent graduates for the purpose of establishing academically important programs in bovine embryo transfer and in equine reproductive management, was stunned, as I was, when they abruptly resigned from the School to set-up local private practices, taking our clientele with them. To this day, my gorge rises when I recall this disloyal, venal behavior.

As the land mass of the New Bolton campus increased to more than 687 acres through the acquisition of adjacent farmland, and as new clinical and research facilities and Centers were added, there was exponential growth in the numbers of professors, instructors, lecturers,

residents, interns, visiting academics, nurses, groomers, and technicians. In such a diverse and complex community, with many egos competing for position, resources, cases, and space, some level of discord was inevitable. Mostly it was short-lived and manageable, staunchly by a shared commitment to the School's mission and a generally pervasive feeling of respect and admiration for one's colleagues. Occasionally, quarrels erupted and metastasized, damaging programs and individuals, and even interfering with efforts to recruit candidates for open positions. Though there are countless examples throughout human history, the harm and pain that one or two malevolent individuals can inflict upon an institution or community continues to astonish me.

But as I grow old and look back at my thirty-seven years at Penn, good memories, like a soothing balm, far outweigh the bad. If I were free to choose a legacy, it would be the extraordinary colleagues – most with reputations that far exceed mine – I had a hand in recruiting, mentoring, advancing, retaining, and sometimes losing to fine sister institutions. To name them all, to tell their wonderfully unique stories, would require more than a single issue of *Bellwether*, and I would be terrified to inadvertently exclude even one deserving individual.