In Memoriam: John M. King, (1927-2016)

A giant’s heart was stilled recently and its silence will reverberate forever within our profession. It was far larger the most, filled with a love of pathology, a love of learning, of students and of teaching, and a love of challenging both young and old minds alike. It was a heart whose generosity filled our textbooks with his observations without the need for recognition, that filled our lectures with his images without the need for attribution, and whose "Necropsy Book" - the best-selling volume ever written for veterinary pathologists - raised money not for his pocket, but for the education of veterinarians around the world.

John M. King’s peers called him a "legend" or a "pillar of pathology", but he was so much more. John was beyond larger than life, he was mythic. His childhood in an orphanage where his only shoes were a pair of rubber boots, his service in as a U.S. Army paratrooper in Nazi Germany and his life-long love-affair and 70-year marriage to his darling Marie - even without veterinary pathology, it was a magical story.

Everyone who knew John has stories of him to tell, and some are probably even true. Some of us were blessed to know John a bit more than just his public persona, and our stories can only paint a pale picture of the influence he had on our lives and careers. But knowing John, he would rather have me impart story or two, rather than perform a dry-as-dust recitation of accolades from his amazing career.

I said that without the pathology, his story would still be amazing - but oh, the pathology! John was the unrivalled master of observation and perhaps the finest pure pathologist our field has ever known. His library was the necropsy floor, and his books were the endless stream of autopsied animals divulging their secrets to his knife or the knives of his students under his watchful eye. For 50 years, he saw with those crisp blue eyes alone what most pathologists, backed by the steady
progress of technology, could or would not. Unlike most of us, who have assimilated the mass of our professional knowledge from books and the work of others, John learned it all on the necropsy floor. Although few of these discoveries were published at the time, they populate textbooks today, largely through the hundreds, maybe even thousands of his students around the world, who learned from him and later proved them to be true during their own careers.

John's curiosity was his defining feature. But perhaps even more important was his unflagging questioning of literally everything. He was not someone to accept an explanation simply because it was in print or was cited by a prominent pathologist. Seeing John's hand go up in the middle of one of your lectures meant that the podium was about to become your hot seat, much to John's and the audience's delight. More importantly, he imbued this truth-seeking into his thousands of students, encouraging them to challenge even what he was teaching them. I believe that it is this simple trait which has resulted in so many of his graduate students becoming renowned teachers on their own, as well as professors of veterinary pathology, outstanding researchers, and leaders of our profession.

In his later years, he wouldn't interrupt your lecture but he would let you know at the end. On a lecture trip I made with him to Korea a number of years ago, I thought I was doing pretty well until a week later when I received a 24-page handwritten letter from John of all of the things I had "gotten wrong". I felt terrible about it, until another more senior teacher than I admitted he had gotten one of 26 pages. (It isn't as bad as it sounds – John's handwriting was “unique” at best and try as he might, he could only fit about 10-12 lines onto a sheet of lined paper.) I still have that letter and it is one of my fondest possessions.

The necropsy room was not only his library, but it was also his theater. He was a master showman, always playing to packed houses. Even at 5PM on a Friday afternoon, at his "Show and Tell" sessions, the risers were always packed and it was standing room only. This wasn’t just a Cornell phenomenon – "Show and Tell" toured the country as well. Each spring he would pack a truck with grad students and barrels of tissue in Klotz solution, sloshing his way down the East Coast and the South hitting every vet school from Ithaca to finally Texas A&M where the tissues were frayed and broken from the thousands of exploring hands they had encountered in between.

Many pathologists who only knew John from afar were put off by the size of John's personality. For those of us who were able to know him, we knew John's bluster to be far more a part of his myth than grounded in any truth. One of my favorite stories about John concerned his mentor Dr. Peter Olafson, who had "owned" the Cornell necropsy floor before John. When John took over that responsibility, each Friday afternoon he would help the frail and nearly blind Dr. Olafson to a seat at the edge of the necropsy table in front of a hundred or more students and faculty. John, an amazing pathologist by now in his own right, would simply describe the lesions for Dr. Olafson, who would either comment on the case, or wave his hand for John to describe another lesion. John never offered a dissenting opinion, and his kindness and
obvious love and respect for Dr. Olafson was not lost on a packed house.

Later in his career, John was the driving force in instituting the Olafson Medal, an award given to pathologists around the world who have made distinguished contributions to the field in the combined disciplines of diagnostics, teaching and research. After many years, and only after stepping down from the committee, he was unanimously given the award for which he had steadfastly refused to allow himself to be considered.

To see John with the students was to see the real man. Students loved John and he loved them back. No question was beneath him, and his time was always theirs. John had some rough edges to be true, but they were necessary as a defense for the softest, kindest heart imaginable. Passing years were not always kind to John's unfiltered nature; however, the tremendous diversity of those in our profession who love him shows that good people will always triumph over progressively narrowing sensibilities. Sadly, on this day, I would rather hear one of John's "Williams, just what good ARE you?" than a compliment from anyone else I know.

God, John loved to teach – anywhere and anyone. My glass tabletop still proudly bears scratch marks from when he would hold court with non-pathologist dinner guests and my kids, showing them bezoars, blister beetles, and other bits of magic from his "Black Box" - a battered old suitcase with a chain leash for a handle into which he had piled a career’s worth of portable oddities and treasures that didn’t require fixation.

One of John's favorite pastimes was giving young (and old) booksmart pathologists the "pathology catechism"...over a 100 questions about veterinary pathology that aren't in any textbook. I took it several times, always failing miserably (and later pretending to after I had memorized a copy he left lying around) to his great delight. While a correct answer would bring a twinkle to his eye and a paternal smile, he loved wrong answers best, because he knew a spirited discussion was in the offing. John loved the argument, because in his later years, when he was no longer in the necropsy room, that was where he would learn something new (not that it would change his long-held views on pathology, but he delighted in learning new things almost as much as he did in teaching). At the 2012 ACVP meeting, where he was invited to talk as a “Pillar of Pathology”, rather than recounting the high points of his unrivaled career as expected, John decided to give the assembled guests a part of the “catechism” instead. The ACVP learned that day what we all had known for so long – you never know what John was going to say, but it was always entertaining.

John didn't know everything, and he was the first person to tell you this fact. There were few questions he probably had never considered, and he knew the ones that had him stumped. When you asked him one of these, he would just smile and simply raise his index finger to the sky and say “Ask him”. And his later years, he would tell me “Ask him yourself, because I'm too close to doing it for real”.

Now that my friend John is gone, I know that God is going to be busy for a while.

...Bruce H. Williams, DVM (JPC)
A Very Short Biography (which John would still say is too long...)

Born January 16, 1927 in Boston MA, John attended public school until his family separated in 1935. As a seven-year-old, he attended Hillside School (a farm home school) in Marlboro MA until 1945. It was at the Hillside School, under the tutelage of a visiting veterinarian, where he gained his lifelong interest in veterinary medicine. In 1945, John joined the US Army and served in Germany for a year. In November 1947, he married Marie Ryan, whom he had met at a dance during the war at Aberdeen Proving Ground. (The state still required John, an Army paratrooper at the time, to obtain his mother’s permission to marry). Following the completion of four years in the military, John worked a year for Delaware Power and Light Company as a lineman before attending the University of Delaware for two years in pre-vet studies. Using his GI bill, he went on to Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Oklahoma State University) for a year prior to entering veterinary college (where John admitted to getting a “D” in clinics because of his “cocky” attitude).

In 1955, John came to Cornell (replacing Kenneth Jubb) to begin a Ph.D under the renowned Peter Olafson, and remained for 50 years in the College of Veterinary Medicine, performing, in his own estimation, over 120,000 autopsies. During his teaching career at the NYS Veterinary College at Cornell he spent all of his sabbaticals in foreign countries to which he was invited to teach and do applied research. While many of his discoveries went unpublished due to his unflagging interest in the necropsy room and teaching his students, they populate veterinary textbooks today, thanks to those hundreds of students who verified them in their own subsequent practice.

John’s own best-selling work “The Necropsy Book”, published with Lois Roth and David Dodd, has sold more copies than any other pathology text, and his “Show and Tell” catalogue of over 20,000 images is used around the world by every teacher of veterinary pathology.

John and Marie were married for 68 years, a union that over the years continually served as an inspiration to all those around them. John and Marie had a son Jon David (“J.D”). in 1954, who passed away in 2002. J.D. (who studied business and hotel management at Cornell) and John built houses together on weekends, and shared a wonderful relationship. In a 1996 interview, when asked if he had any regrets, John said “…Only that I wish I had taken more time for family.”

Dr. John King passed away Thursday April 14, 2016. John is survived by his beloved Marie Ryan King of Ithaca; a sister Ruth King of Florida; nieces and nephews. John is interred in Pleasant Grove Cemetery, Ithaca.
From Roger Renne (Tox Path Consultant):

I only knew John King for a relatively short time, at the CL Davis course meetings, the course he and other staff at Cornell offered to people studying for the ACVP boards, and at an occasional ACVP meeting. But I remember envying those who knew him better and worked with him. I found him to be an excellent, caring mentor and an interesting person to talk with about veterinary pathology or anything else.

While at the Cornell course in 1973 I asked him for some wet tissues, blocks or slides from some lesions in large animals, since as a military vet in the preceptorship program I had limited experience and opportunity to look at slides from farm animals. He enthusiastically agreed to do so, took me into his office/lab and gave me a large number of these tissues/blocks/slides. I still have them, haven’t looked at them much lately but whenever I see those boxes of slides I remember John King, his generosity and his willingness to help others.

From Wanda Haschek (Univ. of Illinois)

I arrived from Australia in June of 1974 as a naïve and overwhelmed student in the combined residency/PhD program. I was immediately given coveralls, boots, a knife and thrown into the necropsy room. There a loud brash cocky American held sway. Dr. King ignored me for a while before proceeding to demonstrate necropsy procedures at lightning speed but with great attention to detail. He asked “Are you married?” I replied “No” – he said “Pity”. A man of few words but lots of questions – always questions - to find out what you didn’t know! A stern look but a twinkle in his eye. Luckily I had George Apple, Claus Buergelt, Jim Inhelder, and a few others to help me survive and thrive during this “reign of terror”.

Dr. King enjoyed putting me, his first female resident, through the rigors of pathology training. If I got responses to his questions wrong – it was “Bull---“ or “Baloney!” If I got the answer right – it was” Not bad for a girl”. His KISS (keep it simple sir/stupid – depending on the audience) principle – also stated as “If you hear hoofbeats think horses not zebras” was always in play.

But to really be initiated into the program you had to prove yourself by rock climbing. I did do so several times but that was enough for me. However, others like Lois Roth and Jeff Everitt accompanied John frequently. John managed to break his ankle in a failed belay but this did not deter him from continuing to rock climb.

A few other remembrances – Rattlesnakes in his office! Washboard music!

As my training progressed, the number of corrections on handwritten reports decreased – although they remained virtually illegible - as were his later letters. Punctuated by a shout of “coffee!” or “lunch!”, John would take me and any other poor souls in the immediate area out to the donut shop for coffee or to lunch – but no handouts.
I dreaded seminar and Show and Tell – as you felt his gaze fall on you, a pit opened in your stomach. As Helen Han Hsu so aptly put it – we all got our daily dose of humiliation. However a mistake made was never repeated (especially if it involved “dumpster diving”.)

John always kept you honest. Diagnostic choices were
- The answer according to the gospel of John
- One of his “off the wall” “theories” – these were based on his own observations and/or obscure publication(s) often from the medical or experimental literature
- Hands in prayer position signifying “only god knows”

One of these so called theories was the “brain-heart syndrome” – a syndrome that actually was based on published experimental work – Lois Roth and I did get a paper out 

John was responsible for my career specializing in tox path:
- Introduced me to Dr. Lennart Krook for my PhD research - on Vitamin D toxicity
- Introduced me to Don Lisk in Food Science to provide pathology support on some toxicology studies
- drove the residents to New Jersey to Sam Thompson’s CL Davis Foundation lectures in industrial pathology

A credit to John’s training, many residents, including me, passed ACVP boards first time round. John and Marie took pity on me and often had me out to their home for a meal. He was the emcee at my wedding in 1976 which was held in the Annabel Taylor Chapel. Jay Georgi and his oompah band played the night away at the reception. Guests included Lennart and Nancy Krook, Don Lien, Don Lisk, Jeff Everitt, Anne Merson, Bob and Hilda Riker. As I was finishing my training, Don Meuten, Marilyn Wolf, Chuck Wimberley and others arrived to join the newly constructed residency program ---.

After leaving Cornell, I went to Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge Tennessee and then to the University of Illinois. I visited with John at meetings and during a few return trips to Cornell, including his retirement in 1998. He participated in a CL Davis Course I ran at the University. One day he showed up in the path seminar I was running without any notice. He gave me a pathology goodies box that included blister beetles, enteroliths, a mouse skeleton stained with Alizarin red. He had made the box from an Ithaca barn that housed the first recognized BVD infected cattle.

John gave many of us a superb grounding in pathology. While tough on the outside - and certainly not politically correct by today’s standards – he had a heart of gold. A true teacher and life long learner himself – he gave of himself across the world. Truly a pathology giant. He will be greatly missed by all of us in the veterinary pathology community.
Top row: (Left) John (circa 1938) at the Hillside Farm home for boys. A ten-year-old John was both assistant vet and butcher for the farm animals at the school. (Center) In 1944, John enlisted and became an Army paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division. (Right) On Dec 14, 1947, John married Marie Ryan, a union that would last almost 70 years.

Center row: (Left) A young pathologist at Mellon Institute's Bushy Run Laboratory. (Right) A group photo at a 1961 WSU neuropath course with other notables including Don Cordy, Bob Leader, John Gorham and David Dodd.

Bottom Row: John in the field in Newfoundland in 1963 studying caribou mortality and associated diseases.
I’m proud to say that Dr. King was my mentor!!!

As a student, I was initially terrified of him. His teaching style was different, and sometimes he’d put you on the spot and would challenge you. Many students avoided him because of that. But something inside me knew that he cared deeply and he wanted his students to learn. I remember trying over and over to identify a “lesion” while performing necropsies. I would call him over to ask “Is this a lesion?” And he’d say “No”, and then explain why it wasn’t. Then finally, after numerous requests for him to see the “lesion”……I actually identified one and he smiled and said…..”Bryant, I think you got something there!” If only he knew how happy that made me!

I am so fortunate to develop a close bond with him as a veterinary student, a member of the Necropsy Crew (Summer 1991), and as a veterinary pathology resident. He looked out for me on numerous occasions. After graduating from Vet School, I decided to pursue private practice in Atlanta, GA. I remember him tracking me down through my mother to see how I was doing. He wanted to know if I was happy in practice, and I wasn’t. So he said get your application together to apply to become a pathology resident. That suggestion from him changed the course of my life and I’m so thankful. Throughout the years, we kept in touch. I’d send him photos of lesions, and I’d share with him my personal/professional ups and downs.

Back in 2002, I received a package from him. Inside was a 2 page letter and my class yearbook. I was so honored that he even thought to send it to me. Dr. John King meant the world to me. I’m going to miss him, but he’s not gone. A part of him still lives inside me. He influenced my life and guided my career path. I will always cherish him. He was my mentor.
From Jey Koehler (Auburn Univ.)...

I met John King a few years ago when our Wednesday Slide Conference guest moderator stints lined up back-to-back and I allowed a few extra days on my trip to meet the legend. To be frank, his reputation as an outstanding gross pathologist was rivaled only by his reputation as a sexist, insensitive boor. I fully expected to be impressed by his knowledge, and appalled by his behavior.

But as is generally the case when we set aside our preconceived notions for a moment and approach people openly and without prejudice, what I encountered instead was a personality much more nuanced and sympathetic than I could have anticipated. During his seminar, as he rifled through his famous Black Box (as he must have done hundreds of times), he lit up with the puckish joy of someone engaged in doing the thing they love most in life. His pure delight in teaching was infectious and inspiring, and it was clear that he was able somehow to not only deliver the material in a way that felt fresh to the students in the room, but also to actually experience it himself as if it were the first time. This was the wonder of John—he was the consummate showman, but it was never just an act.

At the traditional post-conference happy hour, we ate and drank and listened to his stories of growing up in a Boston boys’ home. For me, a mother of boys and a member of a bubble-wrapped generation and a privileged socioeconomic class unaccustomed to the kind of Depression- and WWII-era danger, deprivation, and sacrifice he experienced, these stories were heart-crushing. John delivered them with the nonchalance of someone reading a grocery list as almost everyone at the table struggled to inconspicuously dab the tears at the corners of our eyes.

When we took a trip to the special collections room in the National Library of Medicine, I watched the reverence and wonder on his face as he gently turned the pages of a hide-bound notebook from the Roman era detailing the various ailments of horses as they were understood at the time. Later, at Bruce’s apartment, I showed him gross images of various interesting cases I planned to share with the residents, including one he had never seen before. He expressed genuine excitement, after which he tested me on the “catechism” and told me I was “pretty smart for a broad”. Did he make this and other tone-deaf comments? Yes. But I don’t think I’m being an apologist or a self-loathing feminist when I say that despite these flaws, the world of veterinary pathology (and the world in general) was greatly enriched by his being in it, and I feel privileged to have spent a little time with him.
From Wayne Anderson (Wyeth-Hoechst):

On a very snowy, and blustery weekend afternoon in Ithaca, I received a telephone call from John. I was not on service at the time. The phone call was direct and to the point. It went something like this. "Hey a__hole!" (John's nickname for me) We have some great shit down here in the postmortem room, I've only seen this 3 times in my career, you will never see it again". With my great fondness for snow and winter driving, I was presented with a real dilemma. Should I go down to Cornell, brave the unplowed roads, or stay at home in the warmth and comfort that I was experiencing. Knowing John's enthusiasm for teaching, I got into my Dodge Ram Charger SUV, and headed to Cornell. The 2.5 mile trip took some 25-30 minutes to get there, as the vehicle did not want to navigate the Ithaca hills very well. When I arrived in necropsy, John greeted with "It's about time you got here. What took you so long?". There was a big bull opened upon the table. John told me to have a look, and "tell me what you see" I looked the carcass over, and found nothing obvious, but did see 3 calculi in the pancreatic duct. I told this to John, his response "damn right, that's the good shit I was talking about". I still have the kodachrome that John gave me of that lesion, and he was right, I never saw that finding again.

I think this speaks so well for John's enthusiasm about Veterinary Pathology, and teaching, wanting you to see and learn everything that you could. In my year's at Cornell, I received many after all calls from John. They summoned me to Cornell at all times of day or night, mostly to look at slides one on one with him, slides that he received from different parts of the US, and other countries in the world. Some of these slides became parts of his round robin boxes. I was fortunately, the beneficiary of this intense, but individual attention, and I became a better veterinary pathologist because of this. I will always be grateful to John for showing interest in me, and taking the time to share the wealth of his knowledge with me, in a very personal way. His likes will never be seen again, and I think all who trained with him owe a great deal to him. He certainly gave a running start to our careers in veterinary pathology. His wisdom, and the unique way that he looked at postmortem specimens, and microscopic sections gave us a very strong foundation on which to build our careers.

From Howard Gelberg (Oregon State University):

In the spring semester of 1969, John taught the entirety of Special Pathology. He opened his lectures by having us turn to a designated page in Smith, Jones and Hunt. His lectures consisted of going page by page through the book and correcting what was wrong...
Top row, left: John visits Buenos Aires in 1995. L-R: Dr Gabriel Traveria, Dr King, Dr Julio Loureiro and Dr Enrique Costa Mundo Marino, San Clemente del Tuyu. Top row, right: John and the staff and graduate students of the Pathology Department University Nacional Autonomia Mexico, 1998.

Center row, left: Conducting a necropsy lab at KyungPook National University in 2008 with Dr. Il-Hwa Hong at left. Center row, right: John and the students at the National University of Science and Technology, Ping Tung, Taiwan. John had given many short courses on the pathology of swine here over the years.

Bottom row: John with the staff faculty and residents of the Joint Pathology Center, 2013. John loved the Army, and the Army loved him back.
From Jeff Everitt, DVM  (Cornell Class of 1977)

I began my association with John King while an undergraduate student at Cornell in the 1970’s when I was privileged to have him teach me rock climbing. Actually he taught me confidence and how to believe in myself as well as a bit about ropes and knots and rock. Oh and those memorable trips to the “Gunks” traveling in the pickup camper. When I entered veterinary school I got a job cleaning the necropsy room and assisting John. I learned so much pathology at his side in that position that I didn’t appreciate until much later in my training. As I observed John’s relationship with Peter Olafson, I learned how important it is for a student to have a mentor. John served as a pathology mentor for me throughout my training, despite the distance. I learned that it was never too late or inconvenient to call him when I had a vexing case. Knowing that John was in the background as a consultant did wonders for the confidence and ability of a young pathologist. I remember vividly a really difficult diagnostic case when I was at University of Pennsylvania. John remotely and correctly diagnosed “hairy vetch” toxicosis in a group of cattle.

John was tough and gruff on the outside but had a heart of gold and a kindness that touched all of his students. Throughout my training he sent me kodachromes and glass slides and covered the postage as he knew I had limited funds. He encouraged me, while all the time keeping me honest, and humbling me along the way. I remember the ACVP meeting in 1982 as it was my first with a “diplomate badge”, having just passed my board examination. John abused and humbled me in that way that only he could, in that bright red jacket. It makes me smile every time I think of it. I think we should all now strive to perform the Lord’s work as I know he has his hands full up there!

From Melissa Behr (University of Wisconsin)....

Doc liked to rock climb (a lot; he kept doing it even though he fell and broke both his ankles; he would go on trips to the Shawangunks, which are mountains south of Ithaca and a famous climbing destination, with a whole bunch of students and trainees; I think that it was on those trips that we referred to him as "Doc", and the name stuck); and then the "don't go away mad" quip that he used at nearly all rounds, which was really hilarious, and still makes me laugh. "But don't go away mad, because here we have another calf lung".

I was also at quite a few of the sessions where Dr. Olafson was propped up on a little stool and Doc would ask him for his opinions on the cases. Sometimes, Dr. Olafson would say something like "Well it shudda had a gastric ulcer!", and Doc couldn't help but smile - he was usually pretty serious during rounds because that was the place where he picked fights with Dr. Lewis or really anyone - I think he would say preposterous things on purpose sometimes, or corner a student or resident knowing perfectly that they wouldn't know the answer, and then state: "And of course that is exactly the wrong answer!" - all very serious - but Dr. Olafson was the rare person who made Doc smile.

Surely you also know that Doc liked to study mnemonic devices. He would sometimes try to explain how he was able to recite the genus and species of every possible lungworm of every animal for example. It had to do with alphabetizing them, and somehow associating the parasite with the letter. So A was for Dictyocaulus, and B for Protostongylus and so forth; I never did understand the system and I was too afraid to ask him to explain it, so I had great difficulty remembering things, and still do.

When he retired, Doc sent everyone a box of kodachrome slides. I still have mine somewhere. It was really great that he also scanned them in, and that they have been available on the Necropsy Show and Tell (NST) website. I use NST for my teaching, and go to it as well when looking for ideas. I hope it's available to us for many years to come. NST is written in the understated, concise style that Doc favored, and it is a real treasure.
Having spent two years as a resident trained by the legendary Dr. John King, one can imagine that I would have abundant memorable anecdotes and stories to relate here. However, as I am thinking about Dr. King’s impact on my career as a veterinary pathologist, two themes are paramount.

The first one is passion: Dr. King was not teaching from the books, he was teaching from the heart, and by doing so, was developing in his students scientific curiosity and a passion to not just learn, but discover, question and comprehend. For Dr. King, no book (with the exception of his small pocket-size grey necropsy book of course!) could beat hours in the necropsy room, attention to details (like the small “hepatoma” in the liver of a woodchuck that was once again missed!), the countless unusual or classic lesions in his slide box sets that he shared with everybody interested, or the discussions during the morning rounds when he was on necropsy duty (which seemed to be every rotation, as I don’t think he ever took vacations).

The second one is sharing: knowledge obviously, but also small stories, friends, good times and the history of his beloved country, the United States. I was fortunate to enjoy two of Dr. King’s road trips along with other resident mates. The final destination of the trips was Tifton, GA for the annual slide conference. During these trips, while driving from one veterinary school to another, Dr. King would share with us the history behind the places we would drive by: the Suwannee River while singing Stephen Foster’s song, the events of the American War of Independence, the cat fish industry in Mississippi… Every evening we were hosted by his generous friends, typically former students or colleagues. To name a few of these well-known hosts he loved so much to argue with: Bob Keeney at the New Bolton Center, Talmage Brown and Don Meuten at North Carolina State, Dave Slauson and Linda Munson at Tennessee, Cory Brayton in Manhattan, Claus Buergelt in Florida, or Charles Capen and Steve Weisbrode at Ohio State. This was the time for good story telling (often using his famous black box), regional meals (crawfish in Baton-Rouge, BBQ in Florida) and for some impromptu fiddle concerts. The morning was dedicated to Dr.
King’s Show & Tell at the institution being visited using the necropsy specimens he collected for a couple of months beforehand in his magic Klotz solution. Obviously, the Show & Tells were the opportunity for heated arguments around the cause of various diseases or lesions (remember atrophic rhinitis, unilateral renal shutdown, or calf pneumonia!), for many “God said so” or “Ask Him” (pointing his finger to the sky), and for residents to consider a career move as truck drivers. Besides the inconvenience of long trips and the smell in the van, these trips were one week of unmatched education, fun and discovery.

There are many ways to educate veterinary pathologists. Dr. King’s approach was certainly unique and provided many opportunities for education, humor and argumentation. Trainees of Dr. King were participants in an educational style that was “atypical”, but with proven success. It probably would not fit today’s standards and I am not too convinced that this is a good thing. Dr. King’s passion and dedication to students and veterinary pathology were real and enormous, he was a man with a big heart and with high expectations for his students, and these traits made him the veterinary pathology educator par excellence. I am so grateful to have been a John King’s “wannabe” and for the opportunity to share these precious memories in tribute to this exceptional mentor.

From Cory Brayton (Johns Hopkins University)

Despite his words I was fortunate to recognize Dr. King’s great heart, and his love of pathology, teaching, and Cornell early in my veterinary education. I am grateful for the time and effort that he offered to any and all who were interested, even for the hard times that he gave some of us.

Pathology is Fun and Fundamental. Gross photographs should be beautiful and informative, not gross. Knives should be sharp. Scalpels should be avoided.

I am fortunate and proud to be a part of this larger family that love pathology and the Kings. I will miss his stories that made pathology memorable even to those who expected to have no interest in pathology, his enthusiasm for a great case, his unconventional approach to actively searching and researching causes of disease, his black box museum pieces, his inscrutable letters, current case concerns, and thought provoking questions.

THANK YOU, John and Marie King.
I told those gathered I may need to read this or I will falter. I am only one of the many students that learned from THE LEGEND. There are more articulate and accomplished colleagues in the audience or that will come to this podium that can pay tribute to my teacher, a Cornell icon. He was our Secretariat, our JFK, and our CSI before we knew that term, and he was a character, larger than life itself. He truly stepped to the beat of his own drummer. Stories abound. His heart was the size of Secretariat’s but in the end not even a heart full of students, passion for pathology, love for his wife and pride in his art could beat forever. And now we are gathered to tell Marie, his colleagues, his students and maybe him, what we should have said over the years.

I thank Marie for letting us return to her life for these few days. We should have returned more often, it is something I regret not doing for him, he would have loved a visit. He absolutely loved his students, sometimes he withdrew that love for moments or months but he gave it back as long as we worked hard. He rewarded those that worked hard. If I visited I would have gotten his quizzes wrong and he might say, “Maybe you should have been a truck driver after all, Donald.” I think I disappointed him by studying cancer, which was not a big enough challenge for him. And Marie, we all thank you for sharing Dr King with veterinary pathology for so many years. He loved you and your son but you let him spend hours and hours, years, with us doing what he loved to do, teach and solve diagnostic cases. He was always in the lab.

I called their home when I heard how sick he was and Marie gave me a memory we can all smile about. “He is in and out of consciousness but when he checks away from me he rambles on and on about pathology.” That is our teacher, talking pathology. I thank Bruce Williams, he does an excellent job at whatever tasks he is given, and sadly saying goodbye and writing eulogies for legends and heroes of veterinary pathology has befallen him. He mixes facts with lore and humor and reminds me, “Go light, Don and just tell some King stories... there will be plenty of wet eyes.” I also thank Cornell. I want to be very clear - Dr King loved Cornell… yes, the road had some bumps, but he was proud to be a Cornellian, remembrances of him should be told here. He was a student of history and he knew of the individuals that walked our halls and built the reputation of Cornell – Olaflson, Jubb, McEntee, Rickard, Krook, Fox, Kirk, Dr D, Tasker, Bentick-Smith, Evans, Habel, Bruner, Carmichael, Roberts and more and now he is one of those. You should not have to die to be a legend.

As Dr King aged he became softer….. he only had that direction to go. People, old friends and history were now as important to him as the necropsy room and his students had been. Years ago, he gave me a gift of gift was a wooden framed collection of old (antiquated) veterinary medical instruments -the fact he gave me something of the history of Cornell, a present he made with his hand (he and his son liked to work with wood) is something I cherish. It came from the man, a pathologist that we all respected and we hoped we could earn his respect in return. I am certain that Cornell will do something that honors him, the pathologist that gave so much to all of us, and a University he loved and respected. Dr King deserves that.

On the lighter side – I composed a list of “Dr King-isms” last night, the things he did or the phrases he coined that were a fun part of him……..NO GREAT SHAKES, BALONEY, BUNK, Unilateral renal shutdown, right dorsal colitis, brain-heart syndrome, rattlesnakes on the necropsy floor or in his office, rock climbing, climbing silos!!! He did have a few loose screws, Marie – such as the 1500 lbs of blood guts and glory packed in a van with American and foreign grad students and residents travelling the east coast from NY to Florida for the JOHN KING SHOW and TELL! Who else would do something like that?
Dr. King did not tolerate fools, the necropsy lab was HIS, it was his theater and he ruled it, he was tough and he said he was tough on us so WE WOULD LEARN. He did not quote Kahlil Gibran, and perhaps I should not, but part of his quote about a teacher reads, “If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.” That is what Dr. King did through example and questions.

One of my learning experiences took me to the threshold instead of the necropsy cooler……I was sent dumpster diving…..for the limbs of an angus cow that had died with anemia, icterus, splenomegaly but its urine was yellow and not red or brown. Well, Dr King was not on duty, but that did not matter, I was the resident and when he came in, he quizzed me. “Well, Meuten what did you see?” I told him and then……“Well what was the cause?” I had to say we did not know the exact cause but these were my differentials. “Not only do you NOT KNOW THE EXACT CAUSE Meuten, you do NOT know the CAUSE AT ALL! Listing possibilities doesn’t help anyone, (a few expletives) and… you FAILED. Did you look for anaplasma in the blood?” “It was dead, Dr. King and there was no CBC performed.” “I know it was dead, they are all dead in here and you will be soon if you don’t go get me a leg from one of the barrels.” “Yes sir.!”

We made the slide and I took it to Dr Bentick-Smith who commented on the quality of the film, and I WAS NOT about to tell Dr King his slide was not up to the standards of Clinical Pathology, Dr. Bentick –Smith stained the slide and of course he and Dr Tasker showed me dark dots on the RBCs - anaplasmosis. HE WAS RIGHT and it does not take many of those cases for the LORE and the LEGEND TO GROW. It is also a good example of how a series of events and words with Dr King can be branded into your memory for 40 years!

I will conclude with this. In 1996, Bruce gave me the honor to interview Dr King on tape for the first in a series of interviews for the Foundation on “Legends in Pathology”. The interview went for hours and yesterday, Bruce gave me a copy of the tape. It was great for several reasons – I saw and heard the Dr King we all remember – bigger than life, wry smile, facial twists, strong, dynamic, a little full of himself – all the features we want to freeze in time. He was back for that moment, I never had to see him grow old or weak, and he will be forever strong to me. At the end of that three-hour interview, I asked what he would like to be remembered for professionally and personally - what he might like to hear said on this day. He thought for a moment and said, “Professionally…for all of my students.” He was very proud of us. He loved teaching, and using the necropsy lab to teach from. I was pleased that of all his many accomplishments, that was the one he singled out. He was the finest diagnostic pathologist I will ever know and I suspect that is true for many of you reading this. On the personal side, he said – “I’d like to know my son loved me and my wife.”

Goodbye, Dr. King - my teacher.
...From Evelyne Polack (Biogen-Idec)
....a school report on John by her 8th grade daughter Keni

The Life of John McKain King

During the Great Depression, a boy with no money living at a boy’s school wanted to be with his friends at a local football game. The game was at a high school three miles down the road, but there was a small fee that he could not afford to pay. The only solution he could find was to pretend he could play the clarinet. Although he could not play a note, the band still accepted him with a uniform and free entrances to all games.

When talking about his childhood, John King makes an effort to point out that the boy’s school he attended was not a reform school. John’s father was an alcoholic, while his mother had to give up her son and three daughters because most of the time she did not have a home for them to live in. John’s three older sisters went to live with relatives, but for an eight-year-old boy the only proper place for an upbringing was the boy’s school. He was born on January 16, 1927, in Boston Massachusetts. From 1935 until 1944, John lived at the boarding school. There he went to school and had chores. He was probably the only boy that actually liked to take care of the sick animals in the farm. It was at that time that he decided he wanted to be a veterinarian. Again he did not have any money, but he never doubted he was not going to be able to afford college. He also did not doubt himself in school. He questioned just about everything and he wanted to learn about all that was offered. Many of the adults would say to him “John you are a cocky boy” but it never stopped him from going out and getting what he wanted.

The best thing that ever happened to John was in 1944 when he volunteered to join the army. Like many seventeen year old boys, he was curious and thought he was immortal, otherwise he would not have gone. Luckily when he went to Germany, the fighting there was over although the war was still on. While in the Paratroopers John had a great time. He enjoyed seeing the new machines and different places, he met a girl named Mary, she was an E.T.O. (European Theater of Operations). The couple moved to Delaware, where months later they married and had a son, Jon David King known as JD. There John attended the University of Delaware for no charge as one of the benefits for serving in the war. He was also offered fifty dollars a month to help his new family. From there he went to Oklahoma State University for his DVM. The army no longer paid full price for that, so John
took up many odd jobs to pay the rest. He is proud of all the jobs he did which ranged from a wheat harvester to a cop at the race tracks. When he was done with vet school he wanted to take care of everybody’s sick pets. But soon enough he found himself being a “Jack of all trades but master of none”. He did not have answers to all of his questions. So he came to Cornell University and in 1960 he finished a PhD in veterinary pathology. John got a job in Washington state doing what he studied to do, but what he enjoyed the most were his rock climbing adventures that came to an end after he broke both of his ankles twice and his hip bone. He came back to Cornell in 1968 as a professor of pathology, which is the title he still holds. This job allowed him to travel to many countries, not as tourists but as residents learning all sorts of new things.

John has a career in vet pathology, but at the age of seventy he still does not know what he wants to be when he grows up. A few years ago when he bought a house he found an old violin in the attic. He fixed it up and took a few lessons just for fun. When walking around Shurmann Hall at Cornell some familiar tunes might be coming from his office. It might not be the best of sounds but it’s good enough for him. Playing the violin was just one of the many things he wants to do. His interest in just about every field keeps this seventy year old younger than many teenagers.

John likes to take things as they come. He has enjoyed every place he has been to, and he would do it all over again. Right now he is very close to his son. He works with JD, who builds houses. They joke around with each other and go to movies together. While JD was growing up John was always busy with his work, but he is glad he got a second chance to know him. He is also very thankful that his wife allowed him to pursue all of his interests. This December they are celebrating their fiftieth anniversary with a cruise through the Panama Canal. In 1998, John King plans to retire, but he will be an emeritus professor. This allows him to stay in tune with his profession, but gives him enough time to go after all of those jobs and hobbies for when he “grows up”.

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...From Ana Alcaraz (Western University)

There has been nobody who has trained more pathologist than John King. He was the faculty who helped the residents the most, and as such he gained the respect of all us. We are all blessed for having had him as part of our life.

He was legitimately interested in the development of his students. He was generous and had a good heart. John was honest, direct and responsible. He was a true champion and now he is a legend. He did for veterinary pathology more during his lifetime than anybody I know. It is for all of this, that we all found in John the best mentor.

Path stories:
• Emphasis on gross observation
• Coconut theory
• Equine pulmonary fibrosis
• bloat line bloat bones
• brain heart syndrome
• three reasons to have valvular endocarditis
• hypercholesterolemia associated with diabetes or hypothyroid
• Regeneration vs hepatomas
• Adrenal cortical adenomas
• What is the shape of the wire that killed the cow?

His Phrases:
• “Ain’t firm, ain’t pneumonia”
• WET THE TABLE!
• All animals on the left side
• Do not read the history (until afterwards)
• “God said so and everybody agrees”
• You need to know how to sharpen your knife
• “Mickey mouse stuff”
• “Maybe you should have been a truck driver”
• “Baloney!”
• Could it be a meteorite?
• “Drop dead as a doughnut!”
• No interest
Who does not remember his black box or his penmanship?

He shaped the professional identity of many of us. All of us should continue with his legacy. Let us keep using his website and lets us keep reading his words and his comments. Like he used to say “you do not have to agree with me but if you do not have a better explanation than mine, then use mine”
From Stephanie Muller, (IDEXX)

I met John in 2004 at the University of Bern, Switzerland when I started my residency in anatomical pathology and while he spent his 8 months sabbatical there.

Before our first necropsy duty together, he gave me a copy of his Necropsy Book telling me that I should learn it by heart. He convinced us that his book contained the optimal autopsy technique, and he was fond of saying, “The faster the necropsy is completed, the faster one can drink coffee”. One day, we were brought a cow found dead in the fields. It had been dead for a couple of days, and the body showed an advanced state of decomposition. From a distance, he said “This is a case of blackleg”. Bacteriology subsequently confirmed the diagnosis.

I also remember his wonderful macro sessions; his “Show and Tell”. We learned a lot of important things… how to say “pneumonia” [noo-mohn-yuh, -moh-nee-uh, nyoo-] and quite often, “Because God said so”. At the traditional post-necropsy coffee, we spoke of many topics other than pathology, such as his experiences as a GI., the landing in Normandy and the arrival in Berlin where the German ladies were frightened by the advancing GIs, having never seen black soldiers.

One day he asked us to accompany him a restaurant because his host – Maia Suter - had guests. He had found a restaurant in Bern which served ribs. On this occasion, he told us how much he he missed his wife Marie, because she had not accompanied him to Switzerland this time, as well as stories of their meeting at a dance during WWII. I will always remember this wonderful man, the great Dr. John King, as well as his stories, his knowledge, and his many kindnesses to us, his students.
Farewell, But Never Goodbye

Thank you, Dr King.