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**Personal Snapshots of the Early Years**

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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 refrigerator. Mushrooms Club because we claimed to be kept together in the lower dining room, no service over the weekend. 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 refrigerator. 

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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 students 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 Fer ter, 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 Scholer, 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...
oversee the project. As it had to be a union
to design the facility, put it out for bids and
union construction
remember – surely a first
importantly, it functioned
time, on budget and, most
reality, on budget and, most
importantly, it functioned
in my experience with a
University construction
project. I can’t imagine a

Dr. Robert Eckroade.

some particularly interesting case presentations
at the Medical School. Reflecting on their com-
plexity and on what he regarded as the then
relatively primitive state of large animal prac-
tice, 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 easi-
ly. 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 practi-
tioner preceptor program in favor of an inde-
dependent school-based Field Service was made
when it was clearly evident that the referral sys-
tem, 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 practi-
tioners 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 spe-
cialists in theriogenology – that ghastly arcane
word for the veterinary equivalent of obstet-
rics/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 repro-
ductive 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,
grooms, and technicians. In such a diverse and
complex community, with many egos compet-
ing for position, resources, cases, and space,
some level of discord was inevitable. Mostly it
was short-lived and manageable, stanching 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
with efforts to recruit candidates for open posi-
tions. 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 con-
tinues to astonish me.

But as I grow old and look back at my thir-
ty-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 extraor-
dinary colleagues – most with reputations that
far exceed mine – I had a hand in recruiting,
mentoring, advancing, retaining, and some-
times losing to fine sister institutions. To name
them all, to tell their wonderfully unique sto-
ries, would require more than a single issue of
Bellwether, and I would be terrified to inadver-
tently exclude even one deserving individual.