



John W. Sherbon

October 31, 1933 – December 22, 2013

Dr. John Sherbon was a wonderful mentor to many of us. He represented a healthy balance of academic life and personal life. John started out in Idaho and brought with him a Westerner's understanding of the world. He did his undergraduate work at Washington State and graduated in 1959. He spent the next year in Denmark as a Fulbright Scholar, using the first month to learn enough Danish to capitalize on the opportunity to learn about cheese-making. Upon his return to the United States, John went straight to the University of Minnesota where he completed his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. Minnesota is also where he met and married his beloved wife Ruth, who was originally from South Dakota. They would go on to share 56 years of a loving partnership through the joys and challenges that life would bring. They came to Cornell shortly after John completed his Ph.D., as he succeeded the respected food scientist, B.L. Harrington. The outgoing and incoming faculty taught the food analysis course together for one year, after which John taught the course for many years, eventually splitting it into two courses: one for sophomores and another, more advanced version, for graduate students. At heart, John was an analytical chemist who took seriously the issues involved in doing careful scientific work and equally careful management of data. Later in his career, John's research focus was on ice cream. Throughout his career, John consulted on dairy issues around the world and was energized by his sabbatical leave in New Zealand and work on milk fat fractionation. He often demonstrated for his classes that removal of the highest melting fractions of milk fat made excellent candles on the way to producing a more spreadable butter.

John was a gifted and dedicated teacher who emphasized critical thinking about problems and the importance of following instructions, especially when expensive laboratory equipment was involved. For example, in one experiment, John gave students a powdered salt/sugar mixture for analysis of its salt content. Unfortunately for the students, he hadn't mixed the sample. So if you only took a top sample, you got close to 100% salt or sugar, depending on which one went in first. This was a lesson about sampling that students never forgot.

On another occasion, John gave a fairly long quiz with the instruction: “Read the entire exam first before starting to work.” Only one student left the exam early. He had followed instructions. The third question from the bottom said: “If you have come to this point, put a check mark here and hand in your paper.” John really knew how to get students’ attention.

John was one of the most welcoming faculty members of the department. He and Ruth often invited students and their families for dinner, especially for holidays when some of them could not get home. Ruth was a great cook and we all looked forward to these opportunities. When they traveled west each summer to visit family, they offered their home and boat to a young couple. For some, it was an opportunity to learn how to run a household for the first time. We also learned that a collie can get sunburned and that the vet school would tattoo its nose to protect it from the sun. The household generally had dogs, cats, rabbits or other pets around.

Much of John’s interaction with students occurred outside of the classroom. He always had — or made — time to speak with undergraduates and graduates alike. He got to know students (and faculty) so well that he could predict their grades in courses taught by other faculty.

John and Ruth dedicated themselves to their two children, Barbara and Bill, sparing no effort in supporting their academic, social, musical, or athletic activities. John was actively involved in the early formation of a girls’ hockey league and its development. John coached the early morning girl’s hockey and would arrive to teach his 8 o’clock class after hockey practice. The first thing he did was post the Ithaca Shooting Stars hockey scores from the weekend on the blackboard. Many of his students at that time called him “coach.” He really was, and John had a knack for getting the best out of his students. In later years, John and Ruth took great pride and delight in their two granddaughters, Chelsea and Leah (daughters of Barbara and Mike Wood).

John was a man of many talents. In addition to being a scientist, he was facile with technology of all types. He could fix *anything*. The teaching assistants in John’s instrumentation course got first hand training in trouble shooting problems and keeping lab equipment running well. An accomplished musician, he played the trumpet throughout his life, adding to others’ pleasure by participating in special musical events. John took up duck-decoy-carving and created beautiful pieces that he shared with friends. An athlete in his formative years, John kept himself in excellent shape throughout his life. In their retirement, he and Ruth enjoyed extensive travel, including many outdoor adventures that required hiking, biking or boating. They appreciated nature and bird-watching in particular.

Most of all, John was a *mensch*. He and Ruth were very active members of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Collegetown and John was a long-time member of the Lansing Lions. If there was work to be done or someone in need, John was there to help. He will be sorely missed.

Joe M. Regenstein, Chair; David M. Barbano,; John W. Brady