

EULOGY FOR TED SCHNITKA: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1, 2011

Good morning. For those that don't know me, I'm Doug Wolch, Ted's cousin. Ted was my Dad's first cousin, so I believe that makes me Ted's first cousin once removed.

Ted (to family and friends) and 'Theodor' to many of his professional associates was born in Calgary on November 21st, 1927, making him 83 when he died.

He grew up in Calgary, but moved to Edmonton to attend the University of Alberta. His parents were Abe and Pearl Schnitka, and one of my earliest memories of his family was the date that his mother Pearl died: July 25th, which is my birthday.

He received his Bachelor of Science Degree in 1948 and entered the Faculty of Medicine that year. He later focused on pathology, and was a resident in that area from 1954 to '58. Shortly, after, the Dean of Medicine, Dr. W.C. Mackenzie, asked Ted to travel to John Hopkins University in Baltimore to learn electron microscopic techniques. Ted would later use this knowledge in order to set up an electron microscopy laboratory at the U of A. Ted did just that over a ten year period, working on the cutting edge of this technique. Eventually, larger institutions began to take over the field, but as was Ted's nature he did not begrudge this fact, and simply moved onto other projects. He spent his entire career at the U of A.

Ted received many awards and honours during his lifetime, too numerous to mention here..but I'll mention one: The Alberta Medical Association awarded him the 1983 Alumni Achievement of Excellence award. He served as Chairman of the Department of Pathology for many years until 1987, where at age 60, he was named Professor Emeritus (retired). He continued to write collaborative scientific papers and book chapters, though and never lost his work ethic.

Ted played the violin when he was younger, and enjoyed music throughout his life. He collected African carvings, and was proud of his parent's antique collection which he never gave up. He also loved gardening, reading and photography.

He cared deeply about Jewish affairs and Israel, which he visited twice and financially supported, along with other causes. He regularly listened to Kol Israeli radio on short-wave and as was a proud Jew. It's gratifying that he not only reached Bar Mitzvah age once, 13, but twice at 83. 83, being the customary age of eligibility for a second Bar Mitzvah.

In a personal sense Ted epitomized the term, "a gentleman and a scholar". He was a humble man who downplayed his many professional accomplishments. In the classroom he was patient with his students and to the surprise of many, exhibited a quiet but keen sense of humour (as Cantor Mannes pointed out). This, combined with his extraordinary knowledge, made Ted a very effective instructor. He twice won Teacher of the Year award in Medicine, and was runner up several times.

He was also, frankly speaking, a bit of a character, tramping around in his ever-present galoshes and trundling along on his well-worn bicycle. He actually owned six of them, preferring not to repair, but just move on to the next one, as required. And he never learned to drive a car. Perhaps it is similar to the story about Einstein, who allegedly wore the same type clothing everyday, in order not to waste brainpower in choosing: Ted may have felt the same way about varying his mode of transport.

Ted married Toby Garfin after he retired, and they had been married twenty-three years when he died. Unfortunately, they both had health issues throughout this time, and Toby remains in the General Hospital dementia ward today. Ted was able to spend a little time with her at the General earlier this year, as they shared a room before he moved over to the Royal Alexandra hospital last month.

When I went to visit Ted earlier this year, I'm convinced I saw a small glint in his eye and believe that he appreciated those that wanted to visit and help him, more than he sometimes let on. To begin with, his caregivers, who assisted Toby and Ted when they were able to live more independently in a downtown condo. But particularly: Ron Wolch and Bob Aaron who have always been tireless in their efforts to assist their cousin when required. Ted didn't have a big family, but had family that cared about him in a big way.

Ted was fiercely independent during his lifetime and right up to the end. He knew what he wanted and rarely wavered. I believe we can take comfort in the fact that if Ted has passed away, it was in large part on his terms and when he was ready.