In Memoriam:
Bradley E. Copeland, M.D.
(1921-2003)

Dr. Bradley Ellsworth Copeland died in Cincinnati on 23 May 2003 at the age of 81 years.

Brad was born in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, on 8 September 1921. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1943 and the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1945. After internship at the University of Pennsylvania, Brad was trained in clinical chemistry and clinical pathology at the VA Hospital in Coatesville, PA, the Cleveland Clinic, and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. He was board-certified in clinical pathology in 1951 and in clinical chemistry in 1962.

Brad served on the staff of the New England Deaconess and New England Baptist Hospitals in Boston from 1950 to 1979. He became Chair of Pathology at both institutions, as well as Chief of Staff at the New England Baptist Hospital. He rose to Associate Professor of Pathology at Harvard Medical School and was an Adjunct Professor of Biology at Northeastern University.

Brad Copeland and his wife, Jackie, moved to Cincinnati in 1979, which is where I (AJP) met him. Brad was Chief of Pathology and Laboratory Services at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center and Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine until his retirement at age 70 in 1991. Brad continued to practice clinical pathology as Director of the Laboratory at Adams County Hospital until 1999.

These dry facts do not capture the man. My friend, Brad Copeland, was one of those people who changed the world for the better. He was always delving into new ways of doing things and improving old ways. If he thought that things were wrong, he would work hard to correct them. Although he had changed the world, he never bragged about it.

Brad's mentor was Dr. F. William Sunderman, Sr., who was one of the first clinical pathologists to demonstrate that hospital laboratories often did not report comparable test results. Brad took on the task of developing a quality assurance program for the College of American Pathologists that would correct this major problem. He wrote the first Manual on Quality Control for the College, and was responsible for implementing it in the several thousand hospitals accredited by the College of American Pathologists. This effort gave practicing physicians more confidence in their laboratory's results. Brad's basic principles of quality control for hospital laboratories are now used worldwide. I once asked Brad why this was so important. He replied that “if the physicians do not trust the laboratory, you have a medical emergency”.

At Harvard, Brad trained many residents in clinical pathology before he moved to Cincinnati in 1979. One of his residents, Saad Ghosn, is now Director of Laboratory Services at Cincinnati VA Medical Center. One of the accomplishments of a great teacher is to have his student replace him.

Brad was interested in standardization, that is, how to make analytical results comparable. He became Chair of the Committee on World Standards of the World Association of Societies of Pathology.
In this capacity, he had a worldwide influence on standardization of laboratory methods. Brad worked with the US National Bureau of Standards (NBS), now called the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Before he came to Cincinnati, Brad collaborated with NBS to develop a standard method of measuring serum chloride.

My friend, Larry Kaplan, illustrates Brad’s thoroughness by this anecdote. Brad was concerned that a lab test for fecal porphyrins could be wrong if a patient consumed a diet with lots of spinach. Brad and a resident ate spinach in large quantities for a month and measured the porphyrins in their stools to determine if this report was true. It was not.

The Fernald Medical Monitoring Program, which started in 1990, allowed Brad to develop his concept of medical heritage, ie, that a person’s clinical laboratory results should be traceable over time. In a pioneering effort, he developed an ongoing system of recording the clinical laboratory data of about 9000 persons who reside near a nuclear facility.

Brad strove to improve his profession in numerous ways. One that amazed me was how he introduced robust statistics in the clinical laboratory. Although laboratories had been calculating what are sometimes called “normal” or healthy test ranges using nonparametric statistics for >30 years, Brad was unconvinced that this was the best way. He came upon another approach to these calculations termed “robust statistics.” In collaboration with Paul Horn, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cincinnati, Brad and I adventured into robust statistics and applied it in the clinical laboratory.

Brad was opposed to changes that he felt were detrimental to medicine. When our University Hospital was to join the Health Alliance, he joined a lawsuit against this move. Objecting to the fact that $400 million was moving from public to private hands, he feared that the public would not be properly served. When I asked him why, his succinct answer was “money and medicine do not mix.”

Brad loved to teach. He tried to distill the knowledge that medical students had to learn into essential items. One day, he showed me a sheet of paper listing 100 chemical structures. He told me these were the ones that physicians must remember in order to practice medicine.

When Brad came to Cincinnati, he seized many of the opportunities available in the region. Brad had a wide variety of interests, and one of them was fossils. The area around Cincinnati was once the bottom of a sea bed. Many of our rocks contain fossils from some 300,000,000 years ago. Brad became an avid fossil collector. Another of his interests was the Cincinnati Art Museum. About once every week, he would take a long break to have luncheon at the museum and tour the galleries. Brad was passionate about baseball and he adopted the Cincinnati Reds. Autographed baseball pictures hung in his office, including a photograph of Pete Rose. Another of Brad’s passions was Dartmouth College. He attended many home-comings. When his grandson, William Bradley Lyons, entered Dartmouth and played football for the school, Brad attended every game he played.

Brad received many awards for professional accomplishments, including the College of American Pathologists’ Scientific Products Foundation Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Advancement of Pathology, and the Ward Burdick Award of the American Society of Clinical Pathologists. He was very active in the Association of Clinical Scientists and he served on the Editorial Board of the Annals of Clinical and Laboratory Science. Brad was author of more than one hundred scientific papers, which were focused primarily on techniques for clinical chemistry, quality control, and the standardization of laboratory methods.

Brad was the loving husband of Jacqueline (nee Jamieson) Copeland and the devoted father of Margaret Ann Copeland of Toronto and Priscilla Jean (William) Lyons of Brookline, MA. His grandchildren are Genseric, Eammon, and Abba Copeland, William Bradley Lyons, and Madeline Copeland Lyons. Bradley is also survived by his sister, Jean Deleon of New Iberia, LA, and his faithful dog, Katie. He was preceded in death by his father and mother, Warren E. and Josephine Copeland.

Brad’s professional legacy is a higher quality of medicine everywhere. I will miss him.

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