

BE BRAVE, HE SAID

I quit surgery after one year of residency, and yet I will owe Dr. Henry Bahnson a debt of gratitude for the rest of my life. I'd lost my fiancée and my father within a week during my second year of medical school. Hank's kind instruction after that time both helped to distract me from grief and gave me inspiration to become a quality physician. When I told Hank 10 years ago that I would be leaving Pitt to train in psychiatry instead, I could have sworn I saw a tear in his eye. It wasn't that I was that good a surgery trainee; more likely he was disappointed because he'd put so much grandfatherly care into mentoring me and my colleagues. I was taking his kind investment elsewhere.

I'm now successful beyond my wildest dreams, and happy. When challenges come my way, I sometimes think of Hank's spirit, and why it is that I ever went into medicine. In the past decade I've slowly healed the bruises from that part of my life and am able to more clearly see and appreciate the people like him who gave so much to us.

This November, I had an urge to call Hank in particular and thank him. I didn't tell him I had a new challenge in my life, nor that I missed his grandfatherly advice. I just told him thanks for everything and that I hoped he was doing all right. He knew the passing of his wife was on my mind; he said, with a stiff upper lip, that he certainly missed her.

I never told him about the difficulty I had in reaching my current point in life. Still, he had a perfect "answer" for me. Before hanging up, he said something that surprised me with its unusual nature in phone conversation but made me think for a long time: "Be brave young man and trust in your training. Be brave."

I didn't know why I'd felt the sudden urge to call, until your recent tribute. His last words to Bartley Griffith were the very same as they were to me. He was a grandfather to thousands of physicians, and he lived his life true to his word.

Paul Dobransky (MD '93)
Denver, Colo.

LOOKING OVER THEIR SHOULDERS

The note on Davenport Hooker ("Last Call," May 2003) got my wheels turning. I think and speak of him often.

My contact with Dr. Hooker began in 1938, when I was a freshman in anatomy, and continued when I was a student assistant until 1941. He was a role model for most of us, commanded respect from all, yet was always fair and direct. He was always "Dr. Hooker" to us as we sat around the lunch table next to Drs. Donaldson, Hogg, and Humphrey, and he also brown-bagged it with us. He ran a tight lunch hour as he directed pointed questions about our projects as well as about the administration of the dissecting lab.

The last time I saw Professor Hooker was as an intern in 1943. I was in the accident room of Presbyterian Hospital, suturing a scalp laceration of one of his colleagues. He stood by my left shoulder, observing my technique. He kept in touch with each of us when we were overseas, and I still treasure his letters.

James F. Culleton (MD '43)
Mirror Lake, N.H.

On July 4, 1952, I had the good fortune of visiting Yale University specifically to seek out my University of Pittsburgh anatomy professor, Dr. Davenport Hooker (a Yale alumnus), then retired. He and I spent a delightful afternoon. We reminisced about the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and his favorite class—our Class of 1946. Dr. Hooker outlined his retirement plans to me and 50 years later helped me define my own retirement plans. I shall always recall that visit as being a most memorable event.

Carmello A. Ranii (MD '46)
Sharpsburg, Pa.

In September of 1943, as freshmen in the medical school, we were inducted into the Army Specialized Training Program as privates. We were required each afternoon to leave the anatomy lab, march to Shadyside Academy, and exercise in the hot sun for one hour. We then marched up the hill to the medical school, climbed the stairs several floors back to the anatomy lab, and attempted to resume our gross anatomy study. It was truly grueling.

One hot afternoon, Professor Hooker, 30 years our senior, joined us in this activity from beginning to end. He then convinced the army to stop this torture and allow us to continue our medical studies.

Martin H. Kalser (MD '46)
Miami, Fla.

OTHER LIVES MATCH

Answers to LAST CALL (p. 40)—
Forbes: minister; Johnson: oceanographer; Wall Street analyst, and urban redeveloper; Reichman: percussionist; Wilson Childers: sign language interpreter; Zeidel: salad chef

We welcome photos and letters (which we may edit for length, style, and clarity).

Pitt Med
400 Craig Hall
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: 412-624-4147
Fax: 412-624-1021
E-mail: medmag@pitt.edu
www.health.pitt.edu/pittmed

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