Robert Joynt: Icon in Modern Neurology

In 1966, Robert Joynt, a native of LeMars, Iowa, a radio operator in the Signal Corps in World War II, an MD and PhD recipient from the University of Iowa, left his faculty position at Iowa and founded the Department of Neurology at the Medical Center. In 1974, I was privileged to join the faculty, receive his mentorship, and become his colleague and friend. Under Bob’s leadership, his mentees thrived and created a department of international prestige. In his introductory remarks at the Medical Center-sponsored Joynt Colloquia in 1992, Bob said, “From the outset, I wanted to build a department that offered outstanding patient care, training, and research.”

He accomplished this goal through his unpretentious, powerful, “family style” leadership, nurtured by his wife, Margaret, and their six children. Bob was a wonderful bedside teacher. He was well known for his use of aphorisms in after-dinner speeches, in social settings, and on rounds in teaching residents. House staff affectionately called them “Joyntisms.”

For example: “If you have half an hour to spend with a patient, spend the first 29 minutes on the history,” he would say. To emphasize the need for hard work in correctly diagnosing and treating patients, he often said, “Even a blind hog in Iowa can find an occasional acorn, but not without sticking his nose in the mud and rooting.”

He wrote and edited with great skill, serving as editor of the Archives of Neurology, of the classic textbook Baker & Joynt’s Clinical Neurology, and coeditor of Presidential Disability, a book on presidential health and how the 25th amendment applies to presidential succession in the case of incapacitation. He held the top leadership positions in the American Academy of Neurology, the American Neurological Association, and the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, and in 1989 was elected to the Institute of Medicine.

At the School of Medicine and Dentistry, Bob served as dean from 1984 to 1989 and as vice provost for health affairs from 1985 to 1994. In 1997, he was named a Distinguished University Professor. Bob died in April at the age of 86.

The first recipient of the Robert J. Joynt Chair in Neurology, Karl Kieburtz, summarizes Bob well. “Bob was the first person to teach me neurology as a medical student, the editor of my first paper as a neurologist, and my foremost mentor and exemplar. He embodied everything good in a person.”

His two sons, Bob Jr. and Tom, remembered their father above all for his kindness, noting another Joyntism Bob lived by: “You can’t always be right, but you can always be kind.”

—Richard Moxley

Moxley is the Helen Aresky Fine and Irving Fine Professor of Neurology at the School of Medicine and Dentistry.

David Craighead: ‘Gentle Giant’

“A gentle giant.” That is how Michael Barone, host and producer of the nationally broadcast public radio program Pipedreams, characterized David Craighead in a program devoted to David’s life and art that aired in September 1997. Those three words exemplified, in a minimalist way, all that David embodied in his legendary career as a concert organist, as professor of organ at the Eastman School for 37 years, and as a dedicated church musician at Rochester’s St. Paul’s Episcopal Church for 48 years.

David died in March at age 88. As a performer, he’d been at the pinnacle of his profession. He possessed a prodigious technique, and could play the most demanding literature with ease and fluency. David Higgs, professor and chair of organ and historical keyboards at the Eastman School, noted upon David’s passing: “He was a virtuoso performer, able to make the most difficult technical passages seem easy; he was a tireless champion of new music for our instrument.”

David was geared in the most positive way possible toward helping his students achieve that same fluency, making his job obsolete—for them, at least. In 1974, the Eastman School awarded him his first Eisenhart Award for Teaching Excellence. As a mentor, he was always encouraging, but never directing, or suggesting a particular career path. At the same time, he had an uncanny way of asking the right questions to help students discern for themselves the relative merits of one possibility over another.

David’s influence on the organ world over the past seven decades is more than a ripple on a pond. It’s like a tidal wave spread far and wide through his unparalleled performances, his careful and disciplined teaching, and the weekly ministry of countless church musicians leading congregations and choirs in worship. In their playing and in their teaching, his legacy lives on. —Peter DuBois

DuBois is an assistant professor of sacred music and director of the Sacred Music Diploma program at the Eastman School; director of music and organist at Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester, and host/producer of the nationally syndicated public radio program “With Heart and Voice.”