



Ephraim Friedman



Ephraim Friedman who excelled in 2 careers- medicine and sculpture- died on June 18, 2012. He was born near Los Angeles California to immigrant parents; his father from the Ukraine, his mother from (then) Palestine.

His earliest success as an artist was at age 4 during the great depression. A WPA (Works Public Administration) art teacher handed him some clay and challenged him to sculpt it. She was astonished when Eph produced a “work of art”. By the following year he had created a prize-winning drawing of a child holding a dog. One thousand 1000 copies were distributed! The bug had bitten him and over the succeeding decades he continued to draw and sculpt almost without interruption. People and animals were his usual subjects. Somehow he was able to endow many of his sculptures with animation. He captured Joe DiMaggio’s swing and the takeoff of a heron. His education in art and his sculpting ended only when he was disabled by the malignant brain tumor to which he eventually succumbed.

With a supply of kosher food for the long journey, Eph traveled by train with an aunt from Los Angeles to New York City to attend the Yeshiva

University High School. It was a demanding program and later in college when he was required to write essays, he found that he needed only to translate his high school work from Hebrew into English to earn high marks. Earning high marks became routine and, not surprisingly, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Despite family pressure to enter the rabbinate or join the family’s highly successful burlap bag business, Eph chose medicine. We find it amusing that even after he had achieved national and international stature as a physician, investigator, educator and administrator there were still family members who wanted him to leave medicine and join the family business! He declined.

He earned his medical degree from the University of California at San Francisco (Alpha Omega Alpha). While in medical school he met his future wife Dagmar Benioff on a Sierra Club hike. The romance

*In tribute to their dedicated efforts to science and medicine, deceased members of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine (those at the rank of full or emeritus professor) receive a review of their life and contributions with a complete reflection, a **Memorial Minute**.*

blossomed rapidly and by 1955 they were married; a happy union that lasted over 55 years. Dagmar once remarked that, in light of Eph's succession of professional triumphs, she felt as if in marrying Eph she had hitched a ride on a rocket.

That was the era of the doctor draft and Eph joined the Air Force after internship. He was assigned to the School of Aviation Medicine where, despite minimal training, he found himself responsible for out-patient ophthalmology and otolaryngology. This tyro allegedly managed to avoid medical disasters on his watch. In medical school he had enjoyed everything so he had remained undecided about how he would implement his medical career until his experience as a flight surgeon inspired him to become an ophthalmologist. Prior to starting his residency at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary he studied with Professor Isaac Michaelson at the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Michaelson was a great leader in the physiology of the ocular circulation and was the first to propose the role of a "factor x" (presently VEGF) in the development of ocular neovascularization in such diseases as diabetic retinopathy. His exposure to Dr. Michaelson stimulated Eph to pursue the clinical and laboratory investigations that became a consistent theme throughout his ophthalmic career. On completion of his residency he joined the tiny full-time Harvard ophthalmology faculty; he became the fifth. He soon became recognized as an innovative investigator and a skilled specialist in medical and surgical retinal disorders with a "minor" in eye pathology. When one of us (SL) arrived at the MEEI in 1962 it was obvious that he was the "fair-haired boy" of the department. His early papers on choroidal blood flow and the changes of the choroidal vessels in aged eyes are landmark contributions to the field. His reputation spread and at the age of 35 he was named the first full-time Chair of the Boston University Department of Ophthalmology. Actually, he was the only member of the full-time staff! He rapidly recruited a cadre of lieutenants, built excellent patient care and research facilities, and insinuated ophthalmology into the curriculum. At the end of his first year the students even awarded him the Boston University School of Medicine teaching prize. Over the years at Boston university he trained clinical and laboratory fellows many of whom have become leading clinician-scientists. In the laboratory he focused on the problem of Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) a leading cause of blindness in the elderly. At that time there was little interest in non-surgical diseases of the retina such as AMD so he was truly a pioneer. From the start he made important contributions to our understanding of the early signs and the pathogenesis of the disease. He was the first one to recognize the presence of drusen as a risk factor for the development of neovascular AMD and postulated that changes in the choroidal vessels, choroidal ischemia, scleral rigidity and the accumulation of lipids played major roles in the development of choroidal neovascularization. Although the pathogenesis of AMD is still debated among clinicians and scientists, his theory remains popular with many investigators.

He had planned to take a sabbatical studying sculpture in Europe but this was never realized because at age 40 Boston University named him the Dean of the medical school. His most important accomplishment during his tenure as dean involved the Boston City Hospital which was at that time shared by all three Boston medical schools. When the municipal government decided that logistical considerations dictated that the hospital be connected with only one of the schools, it sparked a viscous turf war. Harvard was the Goliath and Boston University the David. Harvard rarely lost such battles but this time Boston University prevailed thanks largely to Eph. This was fortunate because Boston University was highly dependent on the Boston City Hospital; loss of the facility would have effectively crippled the medical student and resident teaching programs. Harvard considered Eph the villain of the piece and the rancor persisted for many years. Four years later Eph was recruited by Yeshiva University to be Dean of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Vice president for Medical Affairs at Yeshiva University (his high school alma mater). There were conflicts there as well, this time intra-institutional,

and involving trainees whose experiences in the anti-Vietnam war era informed their behavior as students and physicians. Eph restored peace which was no easy task. Thus, it was a battle-hardened man who returned to Boston in 1983 to assume the presidency of the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and it was fortunate that he was. At that time the infirmary was also beset by intra-institutional conflicts. But by the time he stepped down he had helped achieve stability and set the institution on the path that has led it to occupy the pinnacle of research and patient-care in the disorders of the special senses. He also was able to convince the staff and administrators to abandon two-tier patient care and thus the infirmary provides one class of service to the benefit of both the patients and their physicians. Through his efforts the full-time faculty was expanded and out-standing clinician-scientists were recruited.

It would be a disservice to Eph's memory to omit a fuller picture of the man. Characteristics that come immediately to mind are warmth, imagination, generosity, patience, equanimity, curiosity, honesty and kindness. There was in him an unusual blend of the intellectual and the practical. A subtle sense-of-humor provided leavening and he was always "cool" under stress. All-in-all, he was an outstanding role model.

He was the husband that should make every wife envy Dagmar. Eph was a stalwart in sickness (his own and others) and in health, always supportive. Dagmar is a gifted social worker and Eph convinced her to specialize in visual rehabilitation. She proved to be a great success. Although she hadn't drawn since childhood he re-introduced her to art and again she succeeded. Together they were gracious hosts and generous friends. They were rewarded with 4 wonderful children (one of whom is a veterinary ophthalmologist) and 8 grandchildren. In preparing this reminiscence we had the opportunity to read the tributes that he received from Dagmar and the children on his 80th birthday. Put simply he loved and was loved. Any man would hope to live a life that could earn him the respect and affection conveyed in those tributes.

Eph is recognized by the lectureships named after him at Boston University and at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and by the Harvard University Ephraim Friedman Professorship in Ophthalmology.

Eph remained cheerful and calm until the last days of his life. He had great support from his family and especially the total devotion of his soul mate Dagmar.

Respectfully submitted,
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