



Thomas Paul Hackett, Jr.



Tom Hackett was born on July 6, 1928. He died abruptly in his 60th year, but he remains very much alive in the minds and hearts of friends and family. Many things have been said and written about Tom since his cardiac arrest on Jan. 23, 1988. This memorial minute gathers a few of those words under one banner.

American psychiatry faces a permanent void with the untimely death of Thomas Paul Hackett, Jr., the Eben S. Draper Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and chief of psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Hackett was the preeminent consultation psychiatrist of his generation.

Dr. Hackett's interests were so wide and varied they are best described as planetary. By the age of 11, he had his own sizeable snake collection and was spending many hours in the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History and the Cincinnati Zoo. His fascination with biology and nature led to a long and rewarding friendship with Gustav Eckstein, professor of physiology at the University of Cincinnati, who several years ago recalled: "Tom contacted me to say he had read a book I had written on Hideyo Noguchi, the famous bacteriologist...I hired him to work in the lab...I knew he could handle the work." He was 12 years old. At the age of 13, still in Dr. Eckstein's laboratory, he became an instructor in physiology at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine.

Tom Hackett also was an iconoclast. In his Catholic high school in Cincinnati, he refused to renounce his belief in Darwin's theory of evolution. He was expelled from the school.

At age 23, with his medical degree in hand, he worked as a Public Health Service physician in several federal penitentiaries, including Alcatraz. This experience awakened an abiding interest in the criminal mind. As a court psychiatrist for 20 years in Cambridge, Mass., he saw, among many others, a total of 214 exhibitionists. His treatment proposals reshaped probation guidelines. He also was intrigued by the opportunity to interview the so-called "Boston Strangler."

Tom Hackett brought to his psychiatric practice the detective's fascination with human behavior. His curiosity was omnivorous, and his knowledge matched his interests. He could look at many a tattoo and detect its port of origin. As an adventurer and amateur historian, Tom had a lifelong thirst to know the personalities of daring heroes. He interviewed dozens of World War I pilots, including some of the group known as the Lafayette Escadrille. He extended his relentless curiosity to this behavior of his patients, eager to learn how they coped with catastrophic illness and death. In addition to his well-known research with cardiac and cancer patients, his writings on hypnosis, pain, amputation, the "black patch" psychosis, the dying patient, denial, hexing, forensics, and the Amytal interview appeared in 92 professional papers, 49 book chapters and three books. One of these books, the "Massachusetts General Hospital Handbook of General Hospital Psychiatry," now in its third edition, is considered the gold standard for this area of psychiatry.

As president, Dr. Hackett brought to the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine the vitality and academic excellence that characterized all his endeavors. As associate editor of *Psychosomatics*, deputy editor of the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, and chair-person of the editorial board of the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, he plied his scholarship to improve the psychiatric care of the medically ill.

As chairman of the MGH psychiatry department, Dr. Hackett led the celebration of its 50th year in 1984. He was a remarkable role model and influenced scores of students and physicians. A man known for his warmth, his contagious energy, his hearty laugh, and his direct approach to everything. Tom was a psychiatrist to many physicians and patients from all walks of life. Having once said, "I consider myself first a physician, then a psychiatrist," Tom attacked illness with incisive questions, intense empathy, drugs, Amytal interviews, hypnosis, and the incessant application of common sense.

Tom Hackett lived naturally at the outer envelope of celebration. It was his appreciation of nature and people that evoked celebration. His perspectives on the planet were infinite. He was severe with felons, gentle with reptiles.

Hackett family gatherings were celebrations. Tom's wife, Ellie, was the department's hostess, Tom's editor, and co-leader with him of the residents' writing seminar--a job, we are grateful, that she continues. His daughters, Melissa, Laura, and Shelagh, and his son, Nem, enlivened Hackett gatherings with their own variations of the Hackett incandescence and their ability to make others feel at home. Tom animated all that he touched. Leaves, mushrooms, birds, historical figures and patients lived when he described them. He enhanced our lives. His criticism sharpened our skills; his fondness and praise left us more confident and free. Tom Hackett's life remains our inspiration. Tom died literally in the saddle and with his boots on. With the vigorous momentum ingrained by his leadership, we continue his work.

This memoir owes also to the recollections of Martin Bander and Thomas Wise.

Respectfully submitted,

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