



John Shillito, Jr.



Photograph courtesy of R. Michael Scott, MD

Dr. John Shillito was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, where his family owned the landmark Shillito Department Store. After graduating from Harvard College, he was commissioned and served in World War II as a “weapons and fire” line officer on the Navy destroyer USS Brush in the Pacific. As a modest but proud member of the “Greatest Generation”, he preferred not to discuss his wartime experience. After the war, he attended Harvard Medical School, graduating in 1952. He became a neurosurgical resident in the program of Franc Ingraham and Donald D. Matson at The Boston Children’s Hospital and Peter Bent Brigham Hospitals. He subsequently spent a memorable year in Memphis at the renowned Semmes Murphey Clinic perfecting his technical expertise in vascular and spine surgery. He subsequently joined the neurosurgical faculty at the Boston Children’s Hospital and Peter Bent Brigham Hospitals in 1958. He would continue on its staff until his retirement forty years later in 1995. His tenure on the faculty as he rose through the ranks at the medical school to full professor was legendary. Aside from participating in the training of many future leaders in the young specialty of

neurosurgery, John, or JS as he was known to his pupils and colleagues, was a master surgeon, as adept at vascular surgery in adults – he wrote pioneering papers on removal of emboli from the middle cerebral artery in adults and children in the pre-microscope days – to spinal surgery, and in particular, to his work in pediatric neurosurgery. He was a careful and meticulous surgeon, and emphasized to his trainees the importance of carefully-planned operative exposures and procedures, utilizing pre-operative checklists long before this became a routine in the 21st century operating room. In the days when the faculty took night call one month at a time, JS insisted on taking July call, knowing that this was the best way to inculcate principles of correct surgical technique and patient management on the newly-minted house staff. His trainees remember his patient-centric practice, holding Saturday and Sunday clinics, knowing that parents and patients had to work during the week. He was an early technophile, getting a car phone installed long before anyone else in the hospital so he wouldn’t miss emergency pages on his commutes to his summer home in Duxbury. He was one of the first to purchase a polaroid camera, using it to take pictures of each office patient, photos which would be stapled to the office paper charts and repeated over the years as the patients were followed and grew up. When he and his wife Bunny retired to North

Carolina, John continued his love of photography by giving photography classes in the local community. His residents remember fondly his annual summer parties in Duxbury, Massachusetts, with boat rides on his wooden speedboat, and his many personal kindnesses to his trainees at times of their personal or family stress. After 12 years of work, he published an atlas of pediatric neurosurgical operations that was an instant classic in its day. The text was a meticulous compendium of every procedure in the pediatric neurosurgery operative armamentarium, and it reviewed positioning of the patient, skin preparation, incisions, intraoperative technique, and aftercare. His illustrator for the book was Mildred Coddling, who had illustrated articles and books for Harvey Cushing. JS loved this type of neurosurgical legacy, revering his own mentor Donald Matson, and keeping alive the traditions of the neurosurgical program at the Children's and Brigham during his decades there.

For those of us who had the privilege of knowing and working with him, JS was our link to the proud tradition at these Harvard institutions, a master surgeon and clinician, beloved by his patients and trainees alike -- a man more than worthy of the title of Professor at the Harvard Medical School.

Respectfully submitted,

R. Michael Scott, MD, *Chairperson*
Richard G. Ellenbogen, MD
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