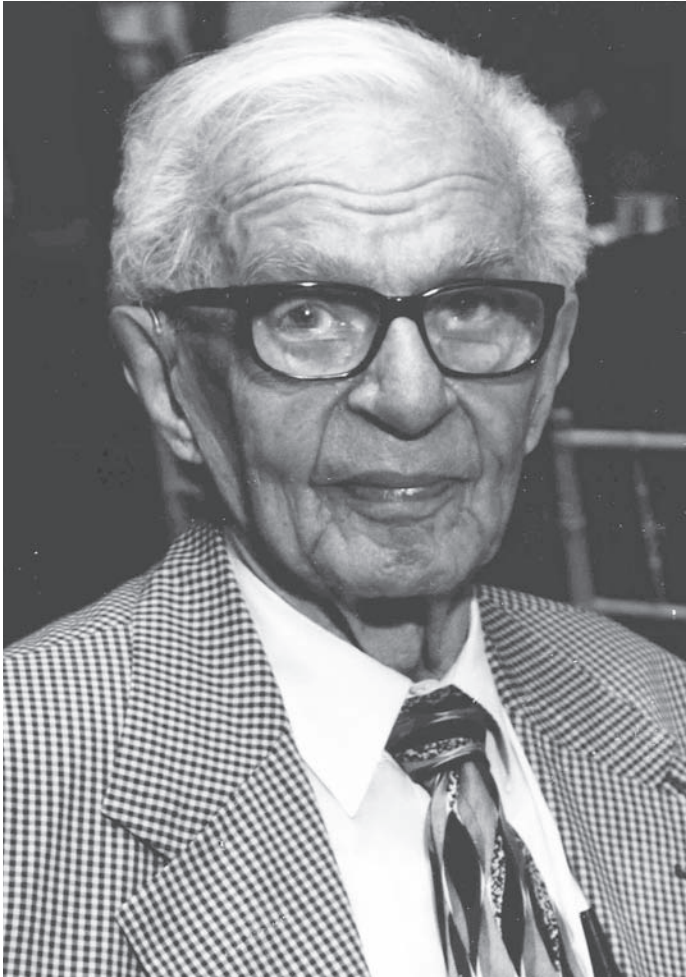




Franz von Lichtenberg



Franz von Lichtenberg died at his home on September 16, 2012 at the age of 92. On September 28, 2012 the flag at Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) was lowered to recognize and honor the passing of this emeritus Professor of Pathology who touched so many lives. During 54 years as a pathologist at the Harvard Medical School and the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and later BWH, Dr. von Lichtenberg became a world renowned researcher and authority in the fields of tropical medicine and infectious diseases. He loved to teach and inspired many generations of students and resident trainees. By his remarkable contributions across the full spectrum of patient care, research and teaching/mentoring, he truly epitomized the desirable qualities of an outstanding HMS professor.

Franz was born into an Austro-Hungarian family of minor nobility in 1919, the year Hungary was divided following World War I. Shortly thereafter, his father Alexander von Lichtenberg, a medical doctor and professor of urology in Budapest, moved the family to Berlin, the center of scientific study in early 20th century Europe, where he could continue his urological research. Franz grew up in

Berlin, earning his bachelor's degree from the Gymnasium Am Lietzensee Jesuit school in 1937. Franz developed a fondness for certain aspects of his Catholic upbringing, actually choosing St. Francis of Assisi as his patron saint. As a youth, Franz took refuge in music, so his father arranged for Franz to spend the year in Vienna studying with a Konzertmeister.

The material aspects of Franz's childhood changed dramatically when his father developed and patented the technique of pneumo-radiography, which produced x-ray images of the urinary system and greatly improved the treatment of urological conditions. Proceeds from these treatments made the family wealthy in a world of Great Depression era poverty. The events of the 1930's and 1940's in Europe deeply shaped the political opinions and conscience of Franz. When the Nazis rose to power in Germany, his father, who was part Jewish, decided to move the family to safety from persecution, first to Vienna, then back to

Budapest, and finally to Mexico City, where Franz earned his medical degree in 1945 from Universidad Nacional Autonoma De Mexico. Regrettably, his father died shortly after Franz became a medical doctor and researcher. Concentrating from the outset in Pathology, Franz pursued advanced training at Mt. Sinai and Columbia-Presbyterian Hospitals in New York City; subsequently, his professional interests brought him to Brazil, Mexico and Puerto Rico, before he eventually returned to the United States.

During his entire life, Franz bridged the old world with the new; he was cosmopolitan and sophisticated, having lived and worked abroad, and he had a wide knowledge and love of literature, poetry, and music. Fluent in Hungarian, German, Spanish, Portuguese and English and competent in French, he also read and wrote in both Greek and Latin. Whenever he gathered with his brother Alex and his sister Lilien, who was his closest childhood friend and lifelong confidant, the first question was always in which language would they converse? Imagine a group of siblings who could equally comfortably converse together in three different languages!

In 1958, already highly experienced in both diagnostic pathology and research, particularly in tropical disease, and already with a considerable publication record, Franz was appointed an Associate in Pathology at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and Instructor in Pathology at Harvard Medical School. He stayed at the Brigham and Harvard for the remainder of his career, rising thru the ranks to Professor and later Professor-Emeritus, and playing a key role as a vibrant member of the clinical-teaching faculty. As tools for studying tissue exponentially exploded onto the scene in the 1980's, he absorbed these into his skill set—even as he continued to be a presence in the BWH Department of Pathology into his 90's. Indeed, “cutting edge” was a good adjective for him. He served loyally not only the Department of Pathology at the Brigham, but also the central Harvard Department of Pathology and the Harvard Pathology community at large.

Franz was the head of Autopsy Pathology for over 30 years at the Brigham, starting at a time when he would smoke his pipe in the morgue and point out anatomical findings with the stem. On every case, no matter the cause of death, he found something on which to offer diagnostic wisdom that enlightened all in attendance. To residents, clinical and pathology staff with a difficult case, Franz was an admirable consultant, readily available, knowledgeable, and informative. Difficult to diagnose biopsies were a challenge he especially welcomed, and Franz provided memorable learning moments, while lifting the weight of indecision, to the benefit of both doctors and patient.

Beyond his impressive clinical acumen and experience, Franz was an eminent research pathologist. Spending over 30 years studying Schistosomiasis, one of the major infectious causes of morbidity and mortality among the world's poorer people, on the same continually renewed and funded NIH R01 grant, Franz immersed himself in all its details. He sought to advance the understanding and management of this dreaded disease through autopsies in humans and in experimental infections, mostly in mice but also in a remarkable number of different animals including rat, rabbit, hamster, baboon, chimpanzee, miniature pig, and then owl, monkey, and differentially in ten primate species. He also studied Schistosomiasis in animals with different types of immunodeficiency and studied the efficacy of vaccines against it. He built an unparalleled overview and understanding of the disease that continues to guide those who work to treat and prevent it. Not surprisingly, he has layers and cells within Schistosoma eggs named after him (indeed, and not inappropriately, they are the crucial layers that nourish and support the next generation!). Franz also reached out to contribute to our understanding of many other kinds of infection, including filariasis, dog heartworm, phycomycosis, actinomycosis,

candidiasis, and leishmaniasis and necrotizing granulomatous gastritis. His accumulated expertise and continuing interest in so many of the less common infections, especially to the nuanced details of their appearance under the microscope, became an extraordinary resource for both pathologists and clinicians, and particularly the staff and trainees of the Brigham Division of Infectious Diseases. He was also exceptionally generous and available to them, attending their case conferences and regularly voicing insights or pivotal questions that sharpened or refocused the diagnosis, management and teaching value of the cases discussed. For half a century an endless troop of variously puzzled infectious disease specialists kept showing up in the Pathology offices with slides or records in hand and the same question: “Where’s Franz?”

During his illustrious career, Franz von Lichtenberg authored more than 120 scholarly articles and over 20 book chapters, the bulk focused on his favorite genus, the *Schistosoma*. His crowning achievement, however was in his true calling—the monograph Pathology of Infectious Diseases (published in 1991) which neither had nor needed a second edition. Within this short book is an excellent guide by which the anatomic pathology of infectious diseases is mastered. Franz also was a key advisor to multiple agencies and foundations—ranging in the U.S. from Armed Forces Epidemiological Boards and the Surgeon General, to international cooperative panels of scientists from all over the world.

To teach, no matter what the subject, was his conduit to immortality, and Franz inspired generations of trainees in Pathology and Infectious Disease that worked under his tutelage. For a young pathologist who identified infectious disease as a possible career, he was master mentor and much more: an endearing gentleman, an ever present colleague and friend, and a truly brilliant man. He was an excellent, caring, and trustworthy mentor. He was uncanny in his breadth of knowledge and intellectual capability. Indeed, he remained, until his last days at the Brigham, the most penetrating observer of any lecture given in the Pathology Department, frequently raising the “million-dollar question”.

He continuously pointed out articles, conferences, and books to help protégés grow as pathologists. He never failed to congratulate a student on a difficult diagnosis with a big smile, a chuckle, and his bright eyes. He was also always careful to point out in private when trainees made a huge mistake but it was done in a way that let them know this was part of being human and how they could, and should, always learn. As Dr. von Lichtenberg’s last protégé, Danny Milner reveals, “In the presence of Franz von Lichtenberg, you would always learn something new—whether you wanted to or not”. And, most importantly, he would always tell you when he had no idea at what we were looking at—a rare occurrence that he did not know but even rarer to have a faculty member admit as much.

As a teacher and mentor, Franz also enriched the lives of generations of Harvard medical students and graduate students. Michael Gimbrone, a four-decades long colleague and former Chair of the BWH Department of Pathology relates, “My first encounter with this extraordinary human being was in his role as a laboratory instructor in the second year HMS Pathology Course, which in the late-1960’s was taught in small, non-air-conditioned cubicles in the “belfry” of old Building A. After some practical hints on how to align the microscope’s light-source with the mirror (so I could actually see what was on the histologic slide), this masterful teacher began to gently lead me down the path-to-enlightenment concerning the fundamentals of inflammation—the most basic of the body’s responses to injury. He introduced me to his favorite cell, the *MACROOphage*—the hallmark of chronic inflammation and a key player in his world of infectious diseases. And, importantly, in addition to the didactic training that he so skillfully imparted, he helped put a human face on the challenge that these pathologies pose, through their ponderous disease burden, worldwide”. Indeed, for Franz the study of disease was always

viewed through the lens of human suffering, with the intent that an accurate diagnosis, and potentially some mechanistic insight gained through observation and experimentation, could be translated into more effective treatment, and ideally prevention.

Former student Robert Sackstein relates, “in the Fall of 1978, with exception of hematology (wherein the lab component was taught by hematologists), I and a handful of students had the unique pleasure of having Dr. von Lichtenberg teach us every laboratory session of pathophysiology, through all the organ systems. For those of us privileged to have had him in this capacity, it would be appropriate to say that we learned more from him than from any other teacher at HMS.” Whenever called upon for teaching, he was ready and willing. For example, when the late former chair of the BWH Pathology Department, Ramzi Cotran, and Morris Karnovsky initiated and ran a course on the quadrangle designed exclusively for Ph.D. graduate students, in which they wanted the students to have an experience of seeing human autopsy material, Franz enthusiastically helped organize a regular Saturday morning organ recital. As related by Morris Karnovsky, this conference “was most popular with and appreciated by the students --- sometimes it proved to be the highlight of the week!”

One quality that marked Franz was modesty, and, indeed, many of his remarkable talents were masked by that trait. Franz was an ardent bicyclist, often bicycling to work until the age of 88; an avid gardener, and a lover of nature, and an accomplished fly fisherman. Having grown up in Germany he could be a rather formal and reserved “Herr Professor” Dr. von Lichtenberg to his medical colleagues but underneath he was always generous and compassionate. Bringing his mastery and passion of the piano, honed in his medical school years, as he played in restaurants and hotels to defray medical school expenses, he enriched the ambiance of Pathology departmental social events, playing popular tunes effortlessly from memory, all to the delight of assembled guests. Franz was also the Poet-Laureate in Residence of the Pathology Department. Each June, the last of our weekly Gross –Micro teaching conferences is a humorous event, devoted to song, dance, music and rhyme portrayed by gifted residents and faculty. Poems delivered by Franz were invariably one of the biggest hits at this celebration. Always with dramatic voice and original rhyme he spoke, often pointing out the humor in some routine facet of life or special event. Sometimes his poems poked fun at himself, such as his pleasure in pipe smoking and sage advice following a injurious mishap that occurred during his bicycle commute to work during inclement Boston weather (both reproduced below).

Often contributing in his time-honored role as the Department’s poet-laureate, he helped capture the spirit of a Departmental social gathering, be it light-hearted, or, at times, somber and reflective. He came to embody the sense of “family” which has been, and continues to be, so important an attribute of the Department’s culture. Over 5 decades, he was the human link, spanning the tenure of four Department Chairs, the merger of three institutions, and the exponential growth of faculty and the clinical services—truly “A Man for All Seasons”—who enriched the lives of each and every person he touched.

But, among Franz’s loves, nothing compared to his love of his family. In Mexico, Franz met and married Sandra Miriam Nathanson, who had come on a two week holiday from Brooklyn, NY, and quickly became the love of his life. They married and she moved with him as he continued his training in Pathology in New York City, Brazil, Mexico and Puerto Rico. He and Sandra raised their six children in Brookline, MA. Franz was a moral but not a religious man (although he deeply appreciated religion as a spiritual practice), an egalitarian and a lover of truth. Thus, Franz and Sandra ensured their children were given a strong ethical grounding. When with his six children, his sense of old world order and decorum could be challenged by their chaotic raucous dinner conversations, and he would retreat to

his piano or the peace of his bedroom. His musical tastes were wide and varied, partially reflecting the many places he had lived, ranging from classical to jazz, and even American show tunes. However, he was never fond of the rock and roll played by his children even as it permeated his 1960's and 1970's home environment.

His beloved wife Sandra predeceased him in 2007, but he is survived by his children Adriane von Lichtenberg of Brookline, Stephen von Lichtenberg and his wife Michele David of Brookline, Alexander von Lichtenberg and his wife Lisa of Sudbury, Paula O'Brien and her husband David of Randolph, Charles von Lichtenberg of Boston, and Karen Fernandez of Newton, as well as his grandchildren, Alisandra von Lichtenberg of Sudbury and Paul Reeves of Chelsea.

Franz dedicated his life and gave full measure to his family, his profession, his students, and scientific research. A long-standing and contemporary colleague, Joseph (Mac) Corson, describes him in this way: "Clusters of words paint a composite picture of Franz: enthusiastic, energetic, convivial, genial, communicative; courteous, genuine, generous, honest, steady, unflappable, supportive; reflective, insightful, thoughtful and philosophical." Rev. Jim Sherblom adds, "He sought neither fame nor wealth, but hoped to ease the pain of life for the few and the many. He taught to help others to accomplish these same goals. He loved deeply, and shared whatever he could. He supported whatever he thought was progress; both political and social. He asked nothing in return, taking comfort in being able to contribute and in the love he gave."

Respectfully submitted,

Frederick J. Schoen, *Chairperson*

Joseph M. Corson

Michael A. Gimbrone, Jr.

Morris J. Karnovsky

Danny A. Milner Jr.

Thomas F. O'Brien

Robert Sackstein

Rev. James Sherblom