

Editor's Note: The article entitled "Pathology of a Teacher: Robert F. Rohner" published in the Summer 2004 issue of the *Alumni Journal* was perhaps the most popular article we have ever printed. Many phone calls and letters were received including one from Dr. Rohner, himself.

A Few More Words From the Wise... And the Etiology of "Meatball"

Your recent publication of the *Journal* was just fine. The Pathology Department and Greg Threatte came through beautifully as did the *shtick* on the dean. I thought Ms. Levy did a nice job making me sound like a dignified chap (a miracle of English composition) and the layout for my interview was deeply impressive. The article on Dr. Higgins was good to read. He is an alumnus to be proud of indeed.

There were a few points that, on reflection, I wish I had made in the interview. First, I look at my time at the medical school as completely self-serving. With the type of students we had at the time I was there, teaching was largely unnecessary for turning out fine physicians. And after operating a Bodymaker machine at Continental Can for seven summers and an internship of old style at St. Joe's, working at the Pathology Department was just a very easy job for which I was very well paid. I worked a lot harder for less money at other jobs including the time in the Navy.

As far as the Pathology Department functioning went, I may have been the mouth of the department but Dave Jones was the brain and Dr. Ferguson was its heart and soul. I am proud to share the endowed professorship with Dave (Jones-Rohner Professorship in Pathology) and look upon Howard Ferguson as my second father. Both were (are) great men and role models.



Now the "meatball" term that Greg used: here's the story behind that. Dr. Ferguson, back in the early 60s, asked me to run a weekly review session for those lagging in the course. It was scheduled for Wednesday afternoons and was designated the "Midweek Briefing" session. This got abbreviated to "the MB session" when I posted the notices of the times and places for it to meet. Some wag in the class said the MB stood for meatball and the name not only stuck, but also became some sort of an accolade or badge of pride. In fact it became so well respected that one student who was doing well in the course actually asked Rolla Hill how badly he would have to flunk the next exam to be able to become a "meatball." (Rolla had that portrait that you printed of him in the last edition taken right after this and it helped explain his expression.)

I wish that I had mentioned Frank Caliva as a house officer to whom many of us are in debt for being an inspiration. Frank overcame a bad heart and a bad stutter to be an outstanding physician and, I believe, the 1st chairman of Family Practice. Frank had the stutter under complete control until Dennis Lyons made rounds and Dr. Lyons scared it back into him. (I won't go into what he scared out of the rest of us.)

Frank went to Alabama later on to have his heart repaired. Watts Webb, a fine heart surgeon was here in Syracuse and was Frank's friend. Frank said that he didn't want Watts to operate

on him because if anything went wrong he didn't want Watts to have to live with it. Frank died shortly after he was operated on. He may have felt the hand of God on him. Frank was a great physician and a good man. May God give him rest and a smooth speech.

Thanks for sending the extra copies to me. In Tully people wonder what I did for a living—now I can show them that I was once more than a hardscrabble farmer. In Voltaire's *Candide* the man traveled everywhere and did everything and ended up finding the greatest satisfaction for him came in simply tending his own garden. The old philosopher was right.

*Bob Rohner, MD, Class of 1952
Tully, New York*

Captured the Spirit of the Man

Thank you and your staff for the most recent issue of the *Alumni Journal*. The article on Bob Rohner captured the spirit of the man for all alumni to remember. The report on the Department of Pathology was also first rate. We really had and continue to possess a wonderful department. The listing of awards recognized the importance of many faculty whose efforts could not be detailed because of limited space. In my view they are the backbone of the department.

*Fred Davey, MD, Class of 1964
Manlius, New York*

Great Tribute

That was one great tribute to the best teacher in the history of Syracuse. And as you can tell from the narratives, that is not an exaggeration.

*Albert Tydings, MD, Class of 1974
Mandeville, Louisiana*

Inspiration for Career

Thank you so much for the article about Dr. Rohner, to whom I owe the inspiration for my career. I am sending you a copy of an email I sent to him. He once said to me, "Lou, we had a saying here at Syracuse that when we took in an upstate boy, he would stay upstate forever, but upstate Arizona?"

Thank you again.

*Louis Rosati, MD, Class of 1966
Mesa, Arizona*

Dear Brother Bob:

I read with great interest and emotion your interview ("Pathology of a Teacher: Robert F. Rohner") in the Alumni Journal that I just received. I loved the photos and your comments and could identify with the physicians whom they solicited for their comments. However, I wish they would have contacted me as I have many fond memories of the two summers I spent working on projects with you. But probably my fondest and most meaningful, in terms of how I chose to spend my professional life, occurred the day before classes began in the fall of 1962. It was Sunday afternoon and as an incoming first-year student I was invited, along with 99 others, to a welcoming in the library. I was anxious of course, as I was not sure I had the stuff to survive that first year. However, as I walked toward the "R" table, there you were with a big smile (which I can still picture) and a "Hello Lou, how is everything in Lockport?"

Well, after the initial surprise, the anxiety dissipated and the rest is history. I think I became a pathologist that day and certainly, my interest in teaching stems from you. Thinking back on that episode, I am reminded of a line from a recent movie, Jerry Maguire: "You had me at hello," and you still have me to this day.

Louis Rosati, MD, Class of 1966

Motivational Teacher

Congratulations on the great article on Dr. Rohner... the most motivational teacher I have known. I remember being disappointed when his lectures were over. You sat there wanting more time with him.

*Pat Riccardi, MD, Class of 1976
Syracuse, New York*

Well Done!

Well done and timely with Bob Rohner. A good fit in issue also. Keep up the good work!

*John Bernard Henry, MD
Skaneateles, New York*

Can You Help Identify Old Medical Instruments?

For the past several years, many who have frequented the Health Sciences Library at Upstate Medical University have been aware of the presence of Eric v.d. Luft, curator of Historical Collections. One has only to share a few moments in conversation with Eric to recognize bona fide enthusiasm for his profession. To add a "new-old" book to the increasing collection is for him to "savor nectar from the gods." What a pleasure to see.

Having visited with him recently, Eric did share a concern. Although a skilled librarian and interested in the mechanics of medical gadgetry, his understanding of such is limited. Over the number of years dedicated to his book collecting, there have also been presented medical artifacts, some of which are without directions, indicated purpose or even proper name.

The question for our medical community is: "Are there physicians who may be interested in identifying such items in so far as possible?" Because of the age of some pieces, we may have already lost a window of opportunity. There are no set time constraints. One would come and go at his or her leisure. Eric and the College of Medicine would be grateful for whatever effort could be given. Eric may be reached at his office at the library. 315/464-4585.

*Ronald Miller, MD, Class of 1952
Syracuse, New York*

Medical Tips Share Yours

I am sure that many of us have learned during the span of our careers some medical tips that have been helpful to diagnosis. An example I enjoy is the story told by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Bernard Lown about diagnosing heart attacks. He was taught by Dr. Samuel Levine in Boston to ask a patient to point a finger at where his chest pain was. If the patient could point to a specific place, then the patient most likely did not have a heart attack.

In my psychiatric experience, I am leery of the patient who compulsively ends the session by telling a joke. Have I overlooked the fact that this is a manic patient?

Send in your tips to the *Upstate Alumni Journal*. (Use the addresses on the inside front cover.) This will be a forum to share your good advice with fellow alumni and also provide some interesting and informative reading. If we gather enough tips, this will become a periodic feature.

*Leonard R. Friedman, MD, Class of 1960
Revere, Massachusetts*



Can you identify this man?

This photo, provided by Ruth Carpenter of Auburn, New York, (widow of Leonard Carpenter, MD '33) was taken circa 1930 in the old anatomy lab in Peck Hall. If you know the answer, email to novick@upstate.edu, or call the Alumni Office at 315/464-4361.