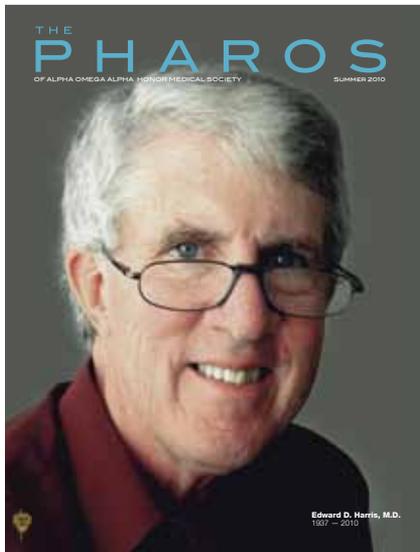


Letters to the editor



Poetry and Ted Harris

I never met Ted Harris. Never spoke a single word to him. I only knew him as the editor of a journal I enjoyed reading. About ten years ago, I sent Dr. Harris a letter expressing my desire to serve on *The Pharos* editorial board. I practice and teach internal medicine in a small community in Central Virginia. Although I've been interested in the humanities since college, there was little in my CV to suggest I was qualified to serve. He did not grant me a position, but asked me to review submissions. I accepted. I was eager to review articles on history, philosophy, and literature.

Every few months, Ted would send me a poem. I waited for essays to be sent; they never came. What did I know about poetry? Not much. As soon as a poem arrived, I analyzed the poem as best I could and immediately returned it. This went on for years. I began to study poetry, and read it every day.

You know how the story ends. Ted (and Debbie Lancaster) gave me a position on the board in 2004.

It's been a wonderfully rewarding experience, and I'm forever grateful.

Ted gave me something else: poetry. He also showed me how to open academic doors for others.

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Vicarious respect for Ted Harris

I only met Dr. Harris briefly, and that was unrelated to medicine. I barely knew him personally, yet I think I had an insight many did not. Imagine my surprise when receiving this summer's *Pharos*, and immediately recognizing him on the cover. Needless to say, I was a little stunned, as this to me was so unexpected.

Let me backtrack a little to the early 1960s. I had recently moved with my parents to a small bedroom community on the West Shore of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. My Latin teacher that year was a stern taskmaster, the way it used to be—and perhaps should still be. No nonsense was tolerated, and total respect was demanded by Mrs. Harris. Somehow I survived. By my senior year, I had enough seniority to get a coveted paper route. By chance, she became my customer. She lived alone in a modest home that had a large, flat front yard. More on that later. I eventually graduated from Camp Hill High School, some ten years after her son had.

Fast forward to my general surgery residency in 1975 at the Dartmouth Affiliated Hospitals in Hanover, New Hampshire, and White River Junction, Vermont. In those days, residents were indeed residents. We leaped at

any chance to do something “normal,” and the annual medical school tennis tournament was just that excuse. My doubles partner and I were soundly defeated in the first round by none other than Ted Harris, that being my only personal encounter. Soon after that, though, he brought his mother to live in Hanover. She would often visit and go shopping with my wife, also a Camp Hill alumna. Mrs. Harris proved to be hugely independent, intelligent, and quite friendly, all surprising attributes considering my opinion as an adolescent. By the way, she informed us, her front yard had been a grass tennis court, where her son had learned the game well, permitting our paths to eventually cross.

Can it be just a coincidence how all our lives are intertwined in some way? The passing of Dr. Harris abruptly engendered in me a fear of my own mortality. Yet is only DNA immortal as it passes from one generation to the next? I think not. The human lives we as physicians and teachers touch and influence daily, no matter how briefly, in some intangible way create another pathway to gain a sense of immortality, through their achievements as well. We both came from a small town, yet Ted Harris rose from humble beginnings to achieve grander things, to change the lives of many. His revitalized *Pharos* became an extension of his personality that again influenced me later as a “senior” attending. Hopefully, it will survive his loss. The world will be a lesser place without him.

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