



## **LEADERSHIP IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY**

**Baltimore, MD, October 9, 2012**

The first time I came to Baltimore was in the summer of 1968, between my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of medical school, for a ten-week fellowship in forensic pathology. At that time, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of Maryland was located just across the inner harbor from our hotel, at the corner of President and Fleet Street. The autopsy area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor was not air conditioned but depended on the prevailing breezes across the harbor for cooling. On the Monday morning that I arrived, there were 24 bodies awaiting autopsy and I was wondering if I had made a terrible mistake. It turned out to be a wonderful experience.

At the time, Russell Fisher was the chief medical examiner.

Werner Spitz was the deputy chief medical examiner.

Ron Kornblum, Ed Wilson, and Charlie Springate were assistant medical examiners.

Josh Perper and Dimitri Contostavolos were residents in forensic pathology.

Richard Lindenberg, the renowned forensic neuropathologist had his laboratory in a city pumping station directly adjacent to the medical examiner's office and did weekly brain cutting conferences at the office.

During that summer, I drove up to the Armed Force Institute of Pathology and finally found the Department of Forensic Pathology on the Mall at 7<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue. There I met then CDR Charles Stahl who graciously sat down and talked with me about forensic pathology.

In May 1969, I attended the AFIP Forensic Pathology course where I met Dick Froede, Jim Weston, and Tom Canfield.

Since I was from Chicago, I was able to attend the 1969 and 1970 annual meetings of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and met Drs. Milton Helpern, Charles Petty and many other notable forensic pathologists.

I did a straight medical internship and two years of anatomic pathology training at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. I may have been the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> forensic pathologist to come out of the Mayo Clinic.

Next, I went to the Office of the Medical Examiner of Wayne County, MI, in Detroit, for a year of training in forensic pathology with the new installed chief medical examiner Werner Spitz.

Since I had a military obligation to the Navy under the Berry Plan, I was very fortunate to be able to arrange a 2<sup>nd</sup> year of training in forensic pathology at the AFIP. At that time Charlie Stahl and Dick Froede were my supervisors. Robert Hertzog, Michael Dunne, Bob Thompson, and toxicologist Able Dominguez were also there at the time were important in my formation.

During my training period, I was assigned to the Office of the Chief Medical of the District of Columbia for autopsy experience and was very privileged to work with Jim Luke, Brian Blackborne, Roy Riddick, and Doug Dixon in the old DC morgue that overlooked the Congressional Cemetery. After my training year at AFIP, I remained on the staff at AFIP for two years and at the time of my departure I was chief of the wound ballistics or missile trauma branch.

Cook County was planning a transition from a coroner system to a medical examiner system on December 6, 1976, and the appointment of Robert J Stein as chief medical examiner was announced about a year in advance to facilitate the transition. I met with Dr. Stein early in 1976 and was offered the appointment as deputy chief medical examiner and co-director of residency training contingent on becoming board certified. Of course, I still had a military obligation and could not report until July 1, 1977.

During 1976, I did become board certified in anatomic and forensic pathology.

On Sunday, March 27, 1977, just weeks before my departure from AFIP, the largest aviation accident in the world occurred in Tenerife in the Canary Islands when Pan American and KLM 747's collided on the runway killing 583 people. Because only the

military had the manpower to handle a disaster of the magnitude, the following afternoon, I found myself on a flight to Tenerife with other AFIP pathologists.

Unfortunately, because this accident occurred just before Easter, the height of the tourist season in the Canary Islands, the Spanish authorities would now allow us to process the victims in the Canary Islands. The bodies were brought back to the Port Mortuary at the Dover Air Force Base in Delaware and processed there.

I reported to Chicago on July 1, 1977, on the same day, Shaku Teas became the first resident in our provisional residency training program in forensic pathology. Mitra Kalelkar joined her in January 1978 and stayed with us for more than 30 years.

When a new medical examiner office starts or a new chief is appointed everyone wonders whether they will survive. It wasn't long before the new Cook County Medical Examiner's Office was challenged. On August 12, 1978, a delta wing British Vulcan bomber with a crew of four, visiting for the Chicago Air and Water show, crashed in a landfill just outside Glenview Naval Air Station. In December 1978, DesPlaines Police served a search warrant on the home of John Wayne Gacy and discovered 27 bodies buried in the basement.

On May 25, 1979, American Airlines Flight 191 dropped an engine on its take-off rolled and crashed next to a mobile home park just north of O'Hare airport. We worked at O'Hare for nearly a month identifying the 273 victims.

Two visiting hospital residents, Dan DelBoccio and Joanne Richmond, were given medical examiner badges by Dr. Stein and

sent to the airport. We ended recruiting both of them as residents in forensic pathology. Dr. Clyde Snow, the anthropologist, worked for the FAA at the time and later became our forensic anthropology consultant and worked with Dr. Stein on the Gacy Cases.

In September 1982, Barry Lifschultz and I became involved in the Tylenol-Cyanide poisoning cases and suggested to the police and emergency room personnel that because of the rapidity of the deaths that we were probably dealing with cyanide poisonings. This was something that I had learned by Dr Joseph Davis in a continuing education course.

The paramedics and the public health nurse involved in the death suggested that the vehicle might be Tylenol and brought the containers to our investigator at the hospital. I asked that investigator to smell the contents of the container and he said that he could smell cyanide.

We then had him bring the containers to the medical examiner office. We called in our toxicologist, Dr. Michael Schaeffer, in the middle of the night, and had him analyze the capsules. By the early the next morning, he had found cyanide in lethal quantities. Since, Dr. Stein was out of town, it fell to me to schedule a press conference and inform the world that Tylenol had been contaminated with cyanide.

In 1993, Dr. Stein retired and I was appointed chief medical examiner of Cook County. In less than two years, my challenge occurred in the form of heat wave that killed more than 800 persons.

We were astounded when Mayor Richard M. Daley began to suggest that perhaps the number of heat deaths was being exaggerated. We were in a bit of dilemma because we were confident that we were right but we understood that we could not confront the mayor directly. My mother even called to advise avoiding a fight with mayor. So we acknowledged that the Mayor of Chicago was entitled to ask questions about the determination of heat related deaths. We also asserted that we were confident of the figures, welcomed a review, and were sure that we would be upheld. The incident has been written about in a very interesting book entitled "Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago," by sociologist Eric Klinenberg.

I learned many things as a chief medical examiner.

During the heat wave, I found that my employees already knew what needed to be done. My job was to see that they had the resources to do their job. I think that our host, Dr Dave Fowler, has done a wonderful job in providing needed resources to his employees.

You probably can't tell your employees enough how much you appreciate what they do for you. Praise them publicly; and remember always to correct the privately.

The transition to chief medical examiner will be difficult if you can't allow your staff to do things for you. In the past you may have done everything yourself, as a chief your responsibilities will broaden so that it will become impossible to attend to every detail. I was fortunate to have very competent people around me including Scott Denton, Roy Dames, and Chris Morris.

I would like to talk a little about what it takes to be successful in professional organizations. The first to attend the meeting of the organization—85% of success in life comes from simply showing up. Attend the business meeting of your organization. Learn the basics of parliamentary procedure.

I can't count the number of times that I have seen a physician get up in a meeting with a very thoughtful idea and fail to have any action taken because he did not say the words "I move that..." In our Chicago Medical Society we would annually offer an 8-hour class for up to 15 physicians in parliamentary procedure. I would send my forensic pathology residents to these classes and both Scott Denton and Ponni Arunkumar, the new deputy chief in Cook County, attended. These skills are transferable to every organization in which you participate.

Present scientific papers, this is good for you and your office. Volunteer for committees. When given an assignment, deliver an excellent product in a timely fashion.

(Here is probably the most important thing that I am going to tell you today.) **Treat your colleagues well.** Socialize with your colleagues. Avoid negativity and negative people. You will not advance in any professional organization without the help of your colleagues.

In 1990, Marcella Fierro called me because NAME's AMA delegate and alternate could not attend the AMA annual meeting in Chicago. She asked me if I would attend. The ink was barely dry on my AMA membership card, I had joined three months earlier and now I occupying the seat held for many years by Dr. Milton Helpert. That turned into more than a 22 year assignment with both NAME and the American Society for Clinical Pathology.

Marcella also suggested me to the nominating committee for a seat on the NAME Board.

My colleagues in St. Louis have been helpful on so many occasions and in so many ways, I would like to thank them all: Mary Fran Ernst, Mary Case, Julie Howe, Kathleen Diebold Hargrove, Mike Graham, and of course I want to include Denise McNally in that.

Jeff Jentzen deserves special thanks for his assistance during the 1995 heat when he supplied me with the heat death mortality figures for Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee just before a very important press conference. I know there are many other colleagues to thank, just know that I appreciate everything you did.

Here is another suggestion. If you have done so already, get an automated external defibrillator and train you employees in basic life support. A little more than a year ago, I had an episode of ventricular fibrillation. Thanks to Jamie Downs and our Georgia Bureau of Investigation staff, I was resuscitated, defibrillated, and transported two blocks to our heart hospital in Savannah. I also need to thank Kris Sperry for purchasing the defibrillator. After a quadruple coronary bypass, I am back to normal.

I want to thank my lovely wife of 39 years, Judy, who has always supported me in my chosen career.

Lastly, I would like to thank the NAME Awards Committee, the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, and the members of NAME for my selection as the Milton Helpern Laureate. I deeply gratified and humbled by my selection. I thank you profoundly for this honor. I want to tell you that I have never regretted my choice to become a forensic pathologist. I feel very lucky to have been in the field of forensic pathology and to have met the pioneers in the

field. I am grateful to know all of you who continue to carry on this important work.