
Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison On the Death of Professor Emeritus Robert Watkinson Huntington III

Robert (Bob) Watkinson Huntington III, born on 12th March 1937 in St Louis, Missouri, died on 22nd February 2015 in Mazomanie, Wisconsin. He graduated from Harvard University in 1959 with a BA degree in chemistry and finished University of Rochester School of Medicine, in upstate New York, in 1964.

During medical school Dr. Huntington spent a year of post-sophomore fellowship that included forensic training, at the University of Kentucky (1961-1962) and after medical school he became an intern at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. His residency training in pathology during the years 1965-1969 at Western Reserve University was followed by a year at the Cuyahoga County Coroner's Office where he first studied under and then worked with Dr. Lester Adelson. Fresh out of training he fulfilled his Berry Plan military obligation and became the Chief of Laboratory Services at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida (1969-1971). Afterwards, feeling the need for further academic training, he and his wife Donna moved to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1971 where he became the chief resident in the Department of Pathology. He intended to stay briefly, but clearly that did not happen. The next year he became an instructor in the same department and starting in 1973 he was appointed to assistant professor, followed by promotion to associate professor (CHS) in 1980. He worked at this institution and served the people of Wisconsin for thirty eight years.

Dr. Huntington did general anatomic pathology but his interest and training on forensic pathology were known from the beginning. For many years, he worked in parallel with the late Dr. William Baumann, who was serving as the Dane County Forensic Pathologist. In particular Dr. Huntington frequently accepted cases from other counties in the state and soon his skills in both the autopsy room and the courthouse won him statewide recognition that identified him as the forensic pathologist for the University of Wisconsin.

Dr. Huntington served as the regional forensic pathologist for much of the state of Wisconsin for several decades. Until 2011 with the establishment of the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office, the only in-state metropolitan medical examiner's office staffed with forensic pathologists was in Milwaukee. County coroners in most of Wisconsin's rural counties turned to Dr. Huntington and the University for forensic autopsy services—and many still do. Conservatively, Dr. Huntington performed 10,000 full forensic autopsies for county coroners throughout the state, and regularly testified to his findings in court appearances. He was widely adored and respected by coroners, law enforcement, and prosecuting district attorneys with whom he worked, frequently characterized as a brilliant, caring, and wonderfully eccentric. Even among regional defense attorneys—whose job it was to question his findings and interpretations—he was respected and revered. It was well-established that engaging Dr. Huntington in testimonial debate was perilous, even for seasoned attorneys. His ability to state findings plainly and as matter of fact, combined with an uncanny ability to spontaneously offer practical analogies made for powerful (and often entertaining) testimony. The subject matter and nature of his work often exposed him to disturbing and incomprehensible events, which he often referred to as “the dregs of humanity.” Despite this, through humor and his overall positive outlook on life, he persevered, maintaining focus on the task at hand, while comforting those around him. To this day, and nearly on a daily basis, one of his many famous aphorisms is quoted during forensic and autopsy discussions at the University.

As the sole forensic pathologist at the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Huntington became instrumental in the training of hundreds of residents and fellows as well as thousands of medical, nursing and other undergraduate students. His enthusiasm to teach went beyond the walls of the institution and he became instrumental in training innumerable law enforcement personnel at official statewide meetings for several years. At the autopsy table, any day of the week one would find him teaching an assortment of medical

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and nonmedical professionals about forensic pathology and life. In his contribution to the community he embodied the Wisconsin Idea.

Dr. Huntington had an insatiable thirst for reading and listening to music. In both he had an eclectic taste that ranged from reading non-fiction, history, philosophy and religion—and, of course, cookbooks as he also loved to cook and feed others. For many friends spending the Christmas Eve at the Huntington's had become a ritual. He loved classical music but was as pleased when listening to jazz and other music. At a glance an autopsy session could start with quotes from Shakespeare and end up with poems from Rumi or Saadi. Lest you think his tastes were solely high-brow, he would often chortle loudly at the antics of Buster Keaton or the Three Stooges as well. At home he eased the burden of the day with his avid interest in planting bulbs, attending to his vegetable garden and feeding several dozen goat kids from a herd that he and his wife cared for. He also had a wonderful fascination with technology, even though he sometimes struggled to understand how to make it work exactly how he wanted it to. His forays into ham radio were generally more successful.

Interactions with Dr. Huntington were both educational and a joyous experience as he loved to exchange ideas with all, colleagues, lawyers and any other person fortunate to cross paths with him. For those of us fortunate enough to have worked with, learned from, and known the legendary Bob Huntington, he is remembered very fondly, and we all miss him.

Memorial Committee
M. Shahriar Salamat, Chair
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