

IN MEMORIAM

Ellsworth C. “Buster” Alvord, Jr

“If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Sir Isaac Newton

Ellsworth C. “Buster” Alvord, Jr, was born on May 9, 1923, in Washington, DC, and died on January 19, 2010, in Seattle, WA, a devoted husband to Nancy for 66 years, beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, dear friend, generous benefactor, outstanding neuropathologist, and past president of the American Association of Neuropathologists (1964).

Buster received his BS in January 1944 from Haverford College (Phi Beta Kappa) and his MD from Cornell University (Alpha Omega Alpha) in March 1946, followed by internship and residency in pathology at The New York Hospital where he held his first faculty position as Assistant in Pathology (1947–1948). It was during this early period that Buster’s interest in immunologic-mediated injury to the central nervous system began. Indeed, his second publication was coauthored with LD Stevenson, “Allergy in the Nervous System, A Review of the Literature” (1).

Buster, Nancy, and their young family moved from New York to the Washington, DC, area where he continued his training with a residency in neurology at Walter Reed General Hospital (1948–1950) and then trained in neuropathology at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (1950–1951). He served as neurologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (1951–1953) and chief of the Clinical Neuropathology Section at the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness (1953–1955). Buster held several faculty positions at George Washington University (professorial lecturer in Neuroanatomy and instructor in Clinical Neurology), Georgetown University (instructor in Neurology), and the Washington School of Psychiatry (instructor in Neuroanatomy). Also during this period, Buster continued to publish research primarily focused on experimental immunologic-mediated injury in the brain.

In 1955, Buster, Nancy, and their 4 children moved to Houston, TX, where Buster was appointed associate professor of Neurology and Pathology at Baylor University School of Medicine. Two especially important events occurred while at Baylor. Buster continued his focus on immunologic-mediated injury to the brain and began a long series of seminal investigations into inflammatory models of demyelinating disease. The other major development was meeting Dr Cheng-Mei Shaw, a resident in neurosurgery at Baylor who decided to train in neuropathology after meeting Buster.



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Buster and his family relocated again in 1960 to Seattle, WA, where he was associate professor and then professor of Pathology (1962) and adjunct professor of Neurological Surgery (1987) at the University of Washington; a position he held until 2002 when he “retired” to emeritus professor. Critical to the subsequent events, Dr Shaw and his family also moved to Seattle where Cheng-Mei joined the faculty in Pathology. These two, Buster and Cheng-Mei, were fast friends and professional partners for more than 50 years, sharing responsibilities for training untold numbers of neurology, neurosurgery, and pathology residents, running the diagnostic service and publishing together 93 times. Buster’s professional interests while at the University of Washington were broad and touched on virtually all facets of neurological disease and neuropathology. Buster had many collaborators at the University of Washington, but 2 long-term colleagues were Alexander M. Spence, MD (who died the day after Buster did) and S. Mark Sumi, MD. In Buster’s own words at his retirement party in 2002, “EAE was probably the high point” of his scientific career that included 8 publications in *Science* and 3 in *Nature* on molecular mimicry and the etiology of demyelinating disease. However, there were major achievements in other areas, notably pediatric neuropathology with the discovery of hexachlorophene toxicity and the publication of *Normal and Abnormal Development of the Human Nervous System* (2) and his focus on mathematical modeling of glioma growth and invasion that started in 1995 and

continuing to the day of his stroke. Indeed, Buster coauthored 4 manuscripts in 2009 and had another 4 under preparation when stricken.

Buster, Nancy, and their family are unparalleled benefactors of the arts and education in Seattle and the surrounding region. The list of their activities is too long to include here but can be witnessed easily by any visitor to Seattle who attends the symphony, the opera, a play, or a gallery and simply looks high on the list of benefactors. Of course, this does not come close to telling the whole story of the time and effort devoted to boards of trustees, executive committees, councils, and so on. In recognition of outstanding civic service, Buster and Nancy were selected for *Seattle's First Citizens* (1991); *Seattle Symphony Arts Award* (1997); *University of Washington Recognition Award* (1999); and along with their family, the *Northwest Philanthropy Award* (1995). Buster and Nancy received Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in 2003 and Honorary Doctor of Humanitarian Service from the University of Puget Sound in 2004.

The quotation from Sir Isaac Newton has a fascinating history, and its conception is commonly attributed to Bernard of Chartres, who was casting a metaphor about the small

contributions of medieval scholarship building upon the major achievements of the classical age (3). Buster Alvord, a humble and gracious man, is remembered as a devoted husband and patriarch, dear friend, generous benefactor, and outstanding physician and scientist. His memory inspires all who knew him, and if we do see a little further in our personal, civic, or professional lives, then it is because we stand on his strong shoulders.

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