In Memoriam: Arthur L. Rosenbaum, MD (1940-2010)

The ophthalmology community, and that of pediatric ophthalmology in particular, lost a shining star when Arthur L. Rosenbaum, MD, passed away on June 22, 2010, at the age of 69, after a long and difficult illness. Dr Rosenbaum was the Brindell and Milton Gottlieb Professor of Pediatric Ophthalmology, Vice Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology, and Chief of the Division of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), School of Medicine where he has been on the staff since 1973. Dr Rosenbaum was the recipient of numerous awards and honors including Lifetime Achievement Awards from both the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, and he served as President of that latter organization. He has been a valued member of the Editorial Board of Archives of Ophthalmology since 1995.

We want the giants in our field to be multidimensional. We expect them to be outstanding clinicians, inspiring teachers, innovative researchers, and consummate human beings—that is why they are our leaders. Art Rosenbaum was the genuine article. Although he was expert in all aspects of pediatric ophthalmology, he was singularly distinguished as a strabismologist. Few people had his uncanny knack for analyzing and understanding the most complex strabismus problems, formulating a coherent and thoughtful plan, and then executing it. He often commented to me that strabismus can never be approached in a cookbook manner. Each patient presented with a mystery to be solved, and solve them he did. In the operating room, his attention to detail, thoughtful demeanor, and technical skills were qualities to be envied. Justifiably, his practice was characterized by the most complex and challenging patients imaginable, and he was totally dedicated to providing them with the best treatment possible.

As a teacher, Art has been described by a UCLA colleague as a maestro in the conference room and lecture hall who taught with excitement and enthusiasm. I have been privileged to participate with Art on numerous panels and courses and have always been amazed by his ability to convey the most complex concepts in easy-to-understand terms.

During his stellar career, he authored 210 publications including books edited, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles. Anyone who performs strabismus surgery is deeply indebted to Art Rosenbaum, the creative innovator. He not only has developed countless surgical approaches to the most challenging forms of strabismus but he shared his knowledge about them generously. Since his passing, I have heard many colleagues describe how they called Art for advice and how he gave to them so freely of his time and expertise. A lesser person in his position of prominence could have succumbed to arrogance but Art was ever humble and a gentleman.

I have heard Art deliver scientific presentations countless times. He began each and every talk with a verbal acknowledgment of his coauthors and collaborators. He was a warm-hearted and generous man who knew the true value of friendship and community.

Art was blessed to have an unbelievably wonderful wife, Sandi; they were true soul mates. She provided unflappable love and support during his illness as well as comfort and joy during their years together. My thoughts and prayers go to Sandi and Art’s entire extended family.

In her poignant poem, “When Death Comes,” Mary Oliver wrote:

When it’s over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it is over, I don’t want to wonder
If I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don’t want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.
I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.

Art Rosenbaum did not simply visit this world. He will be missed but the world is a better place for his having been here.

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