

DR. JOHN RUSSELL EUGENE HOOVER

Born: January 3rd, 1925 at New Enterprise, PA in Bedford County, Morrison's Cove

Died: September 1, 2020 at home, in his bed, Glenside, PA

Age: 95 years, 7 months, 28 days

Cause of death: mission accomplished

This is the story of a very amazing man who gained a tremendous amount of achievements in his life, all the while earning the love and respect of everyone who knew him. His talents were wide spread, as were his interests.

John was born in a farm house in central Pennsylvania and grew up during the Great Depression years on a rented dairy farm. His father, Jason Eberly Hoover, was a farmer, but in his younger years had built his own saw mill on a mountainside and skidded logs and finished lumber down the mountainside while his family lived in a shack at the top of the hill. His mother, Hattie Miller, came from poor stock and served as a live-in housemaid to middle class families before meeting and marrying Jason. Jason and Hattie built a house with their own hands while in their sixties.

John was the youngest child of seven children. His older brother Lawrence died at the age of 29 of testicular cancer leaving behind a wife and three young children. One sibling, Mary, died at childbirth and one, David, died at six months. Three sisters, Elizabeth, Laura Mae, and Genevieve all lived productive lives well into their eighties and nineties, and Elizabeth cracked the century mark.

Young John lived miles from the school house but his mother made sure he never missed a single day of school from grade one through to high school graduation even when he had the mumps. He also had perfect attendance at Sunday school. John played trombone in the school band and was a member of the chorus and the boys quartet. He raised and entered a beef cow in the Bedford county fair for the 4-H club winning as grand champion, his cow weighing in at 955 pounds.

In high school he had a very influential chemistry teacher who stirred up his passion to pursue chemistry as a career. In 1942 he graduated from Replogle High School in New Enterprise, PA at the top of his class, serving as valedictorian at graduation ceremonies. His theme was "Youth Facing a Chaotic World".

It was in high school that he met the love of his life and partner till death, Janet Louise Gochmour, who was in the grade below him (also valedictorian of her

class). After graduation he immediately began his studies at Juniata College in nearby Huntingdon, PA. He majored in Chemistry with a minor in Math.

The Second World War interrupted his studies during his second year at Juniata when he was drafted into the US Army. Now, at the age of twenty, he had to engage in a conflict to free the world of Nationalists and Imperialists. (!) He made Janet his teenage bride in a hurried ceremony while on leave followed by a brief local honeymoon, just before being shipped off to partake in the invasion of Japan. He never really expected to return. Janet went off to nursing school in Windber, PA, earning her RN, not able to see her new husband for a year.

After completing his basic training at Camp Barkley in Texas, and pharmacy school in El Paso, he was sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri and then to Camp Beale in California. In August of 1945 private Hoover was put on a troop ship holding several hundred soldiers which joined a large convoy of ships steaming across the Pacific to participate in the invasion of Japan. The voyage took over a month and John was sea sick most of that time, packed into a tight bunk in the hold of the ship filled with sick men.

The convoy was half way to its destination when suddenly it reversed course and started heading back towards home. A short time later it reversed again and continued on to the Philippine Islands. The explanation for this was that while the convoy was crossing, nuclear bombs were dropped on Japan and this dispelled the need for the invasion, so the convoy started back for home until authorities later decided to bring the troops over anyway to occupy the Philippine Islands after winning the war.

His commanding officer in Manila liked tennis and set up a nice tennis court system with lights, and John spent a lot of his overseas duty playing tennis. John was a hospital pharmacy tech, a non-combatant, and after just one year in the field, he returned home sporting the rank of staff sergeant at the age of twenty one. Medals earned included the Good Conduct Medal, American Theater ribbon, Asiatic Pacific Theater Ribbon, Philippine Liberation Medal, Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation Badge, and the World War Two Victory Ribbon. He served a total of two years in the service before reuniting with Janet in 1946.

The GI bill paid for a good bit of John's subsequent education. Janet and John set up house in a tiny apartment in Huntingdon, PA, off campus, where Janet worked as an RN at Blair Hospital and John completed his last two years of undergraduate work at Juniata College in just one year. John maintained an outstanding GPA which led to a consistent spot on the honor roll and allowed him to graduate in

1947 in the top 1% of his class. A professor at Juniata recommended him to the University of Pennsylvania and John was accepted there for graduate school.

The Hoovers moved to the Philadelphia area in 1948, first living in Cherry Hill, NJ for three years. There, Janet drove their old car to work as a nurse at Byberry Mental Institution where she supervised a ward of 96 patients with only one aide helping her. John took public transportation to downtown Philly each day to U Penn for his graduate classes. They later moved to Media, PA and lived in a house trailer that John and his father had constructed themselves. John earned his M.S. degree in organic chemistry in 1949 and continued on to receive his Ph.D in organic chemistry in 1953.

While John was studying at Penn, the Hoovers had their first child, Carol, in 1950, their second, Larry, in 1951, and their third, Karen, in 1952.

In 1952, the Hoovers moved to the Flamingo Apartments on North Broad Street in downtown Philadelphia. John completed graduate school and got a position at Wyeth Institute of Applied Biochemistry as a Senior Scientist, while at the same time working at Penn as a Research Associate where he had the good fortune to work under a Nobel Laureate named Richard Kuhn. Kuhn was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1938 for his work on vitamins and left his native Germany because of Hitler, he being Jewish, spending some time at Penn as a visiting professor. John and Kuhn worked on isolating a bacterial growth factor from human milk and published two papers together in 1953.

John and Janet moved to an apartment at Lincoln Drive and Wayne Ave in Philly for several years and finally settled into a house in Glenside, PA in 1955 where they lived for many happy decades, and where Janet still lives.

In 1956, John made his final career move by joining SK&F Laboratories where he remained until early retirement was offered in 1986 at the age of 62. Smith, Kline and French has since morphed into GlaxoSmithKline. John had rapid advancement at SK&F: he started as 'Senior Medicinal Chemist', attained 'Group Leader' three years later, 'Section Head' five years later, 'Associate Director' five years after that, and retired as 'Director of Research Chemistry' for one of the largest drug companies in the world.

While at SK&F and working in the lab in a white coat in the early days, he noted the lack of any apparatus in the industry to calculate the melting point of compounds, a very basic task in determining the purity of a compound. Always a tinkerer, he went home and in the evenings after work he cobbled together a

device which did just that. He brought it to work to use for himself, and it worked so well that fellow chemists requested copies. Before long, the device was so popular that he decided to mass produce them. He patented the device in 1960 and purchased machining tools and equipment to produce the first one hundred working models in his basement. Later he forged a contract with Arthur H. Thomas (now Thomas Scientific) to fabricate these devices, called the Thomas-Hoover Melting Point Apparatus, by the thousands and they are still used many decades later in university and commercial laboratories all over the world.

In the course of his work, John has logged some 77 patents to his name, mostly in organic chemistry. While at SK&F, his research was primarily focused on cephalosporin antibiotics, a product that GlaxoSmithKline is making billions off of today. Dr. Hoover also produced published work on his research, including sections in chemistry reference texts such as "Burger's Medicinal Chemistry, 4th Edition, Part II" edited by Manfred E. Wolff, chapter fifteen on "The Beta-Lactam Antibiotics".

He was a member of the American Chemical Society, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Chemists, New York Academy of Science, Sigma Xi, Alpha Chi Sigma and Philadelphia Organic Chemists' Club.

All the while, John and Janet were highly respected members of the Church of the Brethren. Their memberships started at Koontz Church of the Brethren and Waterside Church of the Brethren in Morrison's Cove Pennsylvania. When they moved to Philadelphia, they became members of the Philadelphia First Church of the Brethren where John and Janet held many positions including deacon, board secretary and moderator. They raised their children in the church and faithfully attended Sunday school and church their whole lives. When in their sixties John and Janet spent several weeks working with the Church of the Brethren Disaster Relief Program rebuilding houses in the deep south destroyed by hurricanes.

John was a natural engineer and carpenter. There was nothing that he could not build or fix. His full service shop in his basement is well stocked with tools. He built furniture, houses, and sheds; he fixed his own cars, several times pulling an engine or transmission, fixing it, and putting it back in. No matter what broke around your house you brought it to John and it was fixed a week later with imaginative solutions. Even in his nineties he was very computer savvy; he could install and re-install the Windows operating system, patches, and upgrades. There was never a tradesman in their house; John installed or fixed everything including plumbing, electrical, carpentry, woodworking and mechanics. He was an expert gardener with a perfect lawn and beautiful roses and flowers.

John was never interested in commercial sports, but in his younger years he had a passion for hunting, fishing, and archery due to his farmer roots. He loved classical music.

John was a true genius in every sense of the word. Until the age of 94 he worked the New York Times crossword puzzle to completion every Sunday. He was well read in literature of all types: classics, scientific, and intellectual. Often his children and grandchildren would ask his advice on every subject.

John was a lifelong member of the Democratic party. On today's political scale he might be labeled a "radical left-wing liberal". He believed in truth and decency and competence in government. He believed that people should be treated fairly and wealth should be distributed more evenly. He put his money where his idealism was by contributing to many good causes. His final good deed was to mentor a youth for several years, hosting him several times a week in his home with a goal to pass his high school tests and SATs.

Above all, John was a family man. John and Janet were married for 75 years. They had three children who loved and adored them. Family trips across and around the country were an annual event. Dedication to the proper raising of their children, and providing a stable and staid environment was their hallmark. They have nine grand children and ten great grandchildren.

John's body started to fail him just after his 94th birthday. After a year and a half of slow decline he finally succumbed to the ravages of age and passed away peacefully at home with his family just as he had planned years ago. He is buried in the cemetery beside his boyhood church just a few miles from his birthplace in a plot he and Janet had purchased decades ago at the Koontz Church in Loysburg.

All of the above is fact, and the following is opinion put forth by the writer of this piece, John's son. John was the perfect father: he was kind and gentle yet strong and forceful when need be. All his life, despite his wealth, he lived modestly, far below his means. He cared about people, all people. He was a progressive: when I refused to move from Windows 7 to Windows 10, he was the first to upload the upgrade, telling me to get over it and adapt to the changes. He did not cling to old stale standards that no longer apply. He embraced new ideas and progressive thought. He was younger than many of his progeny in his thinking and openness to the truth.

He was a man to live up to.