On the presentation of the Friedenwald Award in Ophthalmology to Dr. Richard W. Young

Whenever an individual reaches unusual heights in the profession that he or she has chosen, there is a natural tendency on the part of most of us to want to find out something of a personal nature about that individual. If today's recipient of the Jonas Friedenwald Award in Ophthalmology is true to his natural form, you will be eloquently apprised of the elegant experiments that led the trustees to bestow this honor upon him. Therefore I shall not dwell at length upon his scientific accomplishments. Instead, I will speak briefly about the personal side of Dr. Richard Young.

Through my great fortune, I have had the privilege of being associated with Dr. Young during the past 12 years, first as a graduate student and then as a colleague. In order to go back beyond the 12 years of our acquaintance, I have enlisted the cooperation of a few willing coconspirators and I thank them for the information that they have provided me.

Richard Wain Young was born in Albany, New York, on December 15, 1929. As a child Dick was a healthy, active boy who was always full of fun. He enjoyed drawing cartoons and singing and took avid interest in athletics. Although he participated in all sports in their season, his greatest love was for football. He attended Westwood High School in Westwood, New Jersey. During his senior year he was a quarterback on the varsity team with a record of 6 wins and 2 losses. His interest in football continues to this day and I am sometimes the happy recipient of his Los Angeles Rams season tickets when he has to go out of town for meetings.

After high school Dick, along with two of his friends, enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He served for 3 years and was out for only 3 months when he was recalled for an additional 14 months because of the Korean War. As you might expect from a man of Dick's intellectual caliber, he was severely frustrated by the petty rigors of Marine life. He managed to salve this frustration, however, by honing his cartoon drawing abilities to a fine edge. I once asked Dick why he enlisted in the Marines rather than entering college immediately. With his patented dry wit he told me that he joined the Marines to prove a point like most young men of that age. A week later, after he had proven his point, they wouldn't let him out. Dick's rank at the time of his discharge was Staff Sergeant. His mother tells me that he was very happy to make Sergeant, not because of the authority that went with it, but because sergeants were allowed to have seconds and thirds on ice cream in the mess hall.

After his final discharge from the Marines, Dr. Young entered Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and enrolled in a 5 year work-study course. He majored in anthropology and maintained a 4.0 grade point average in all courses for the 5 year period. In spite of his sterling academic performance in the pre-grade-inflation era, I am told by a reliable source that he had loads of fun and dated a lot of girls.

Upon graduation from Antioch College,
Dick enrolled in the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and took a Ph.D. in anatomy. Although his doctoral research still retained certain anthropological ramifications, his interest was rapidly turning to the discipline of cell biology, a decision for which I, and I'm sure many others, will be eternally grateful.

Dick's early investigations following the receipt of his Ph.D. degree dealt with problems in nonocular tissues. His most significant contribution in this regard dealt with his concept of the osteoprogenitor cell in bone. In 1963 he published his first paper on the eye and it was this work, dealing with cell proliferation in the lens, which ultimately drew his attention to the retina. In 1967 he published his classic paper on the renewal of photoreceptor outer segments. It was this contribution and the series of experiments that were a natural consequence of it that bring us together today in his honor. I have not made an official tally concerning the impact that Dr. Young's work has had on vision research laboratories around the world. However, in writing this introduction, I could pause and list with ease 15 laboratories in the United States alone that spend a significant portion of their effort in research based on the concept of photoreceptor renewal.

The colleague whom we honor today does not spend all of his time in the laboratory. He is a model citizen of the University in terms of carrying out committee and teaching responsibilities. He is the chairman of one of the most popular major courses in the Medical School curriculum. As an expression of their gratitude, his students have frequently honored him with the prestigious Golden Apple Teaching Award. Above all, he is a fine father to his four handsome sons.

This has been a most remarkable year of personal achievement for Dick. To crown his long career of illustrious teaching, he was recently awarded the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award by the President of the University. He also climbed the Matterhorn and finished a marathon race during the past year. It is with great warmth and satisfaction that I present the Jonas Friedenwald Award in Ophthalmology to my colleague and good friend, Richard W. Young.

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