



IN MEMORIAM

William Lee Ashburn
Professor Emeritus of Radiology
UC San Diego
1933-2004

On April 18, 2004 Dr. William Lee Ashburn, husband, father, physician, scientist, teacher, musician and my dear friend, died of prostate cancer.

Bill was born January 18, 1933 in New York City. His parents, Dr. Llewellyn Lee Ashburn and Serena Ashburn, moved shortly after this to Maryland where Bill's father developed his career at the NIH in the Department of Pathology and Bill went to school and spent time with his dad at the great scientific center. Bill spent his college days at Western Maryland College, graduating with a degree in Biology, then on to the University of Maryland for Medical school, graduating in 1959. He did his internship at Ohio State where he met Sally Woodworth, fell in love and married.

He entered Public Health service after his internship where he found himself detailed to the Coast Guard and spent time as a sailor. In 1962 he came full circle to the NIH where he did a Diagnostic Radiology residency followed by a year of Therapeutic Radiology at Walter Reed Army Hospital and the NCI. Finally, in 1965 he got his first real job as Chief of the Clinical Diagnostic Radioisotope lab at NIH. There, Bill worked with some of the best-known research people in American medicine, one of whom, Dr. Eugene Braunwald, took the position as Chairman of the Department of Medicine at UCSD. No sooner did Braunwald get to UCSD then he pushed to get the bright young Bill Ashburn recruited as Chief of Nuclear Medicine.

In July 1968, Bill took the position of Chief of Nuclear Medicine at UCSD and began building the department while pursuing his own research. In 1970 I joined Bill at UCSD. This began an association that lasted the remainder of our careers.

And what a career Bill had. He was interested in every aspect of nuclear medicine research, becoming best known for his work in cardiology. He contributed greatly to the development of myocardial perfusion imaging. He was at the forefront of instrumentation development, the use of computer techniques for enhancement of images and as means to quantitate data and get beyond what presented itself in the images.

Because of his research capabilities Bill became an important member of a number of professional organizations, such as the Society of Nuclear Medicine, The American Heart Association, The American College of Nuclear Physicians, The American College of Radiology, to name a few. He reviewed for numerous journals and served on editorial boards. The Nuclear Medicine physicians that Bill helped train are remarkable in both number and quality, including such people as Heinrich Schelbert, Andrew Taylor, and Naomi Alazraki.

In 1994 Bill retired from UCSD to become Medical Director of the Digirad Corporation and helped build the company into an important supplier of nuclear medicine equipment that offers a unique approach to nuclear imaging, especially in regard to myocardial perfusion studies. He continued to contribute to Digirad until shortly before his death.

Beyond the professional man was a person with a wide variety of interests. Bill was an excellent musician, playing both the saxophone and clarinet. He was a member of the Biorhythms, a Big Band sound, and The Finest City Jazz Band, that played yearly at the San Diego County Fair.

Special to Bill was his family, his wife Sally, his three children, Donald, Dana, and Leigh, his three grandchildren, Griffin, Madeline, and Allison, and his mother, Serena. He was a man for all seasons. And he was my friend. Along with many other people, I'm going to miss him a lot.

Samuel Halpern