



IN MEMORIAM

Charles E. Franti
Professor of Biostatistics, Emeritus
Davis
1933 — 2003

Charles (Charlie) E. Franti was born and raised in Ewen, Michigan April 29, 1933, one of twelve children of John and Ida Franti. He earned his bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1955 at the University of Michigan and immediately began his career as an educator. Charlie taught mathematics, biology and physical education at Suomi College in Hancock, Michigan and mathematics at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan. At Suomi, he met Carole Wisti whom he married on August 25, 1956. He continued his own education during summer breaks completing master's degrees at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

For biostatistics doctoral studies Charlie moved to the University of California, Berkeley and was awarded a Ph.D. in 1967. The same year he joined the faculty at University of California, Davis (UCD) in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine. Davis became the permanent home for Charlie and Carole, and their five children.

Charlie held a joint appointment in the School of Veterinary Medicine and the School of Medicine from 1970 to 1976. From 1976 to 1984, Charlie's appointment was in the School of Medicine. Charlie returned to the School of Veterinary Medicine in 1985 and retired in 1993 as a member of the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine.

TEACHING

Charlie's early teaching at UCD was to veterinarians in the newly formed Masters of Preventive Veterinary Medicine (MPVM) program. In the early days of the MPVM program, classes were composed of veterinarians returning to the classroom after several years of practice; many were international veterinarians. The challenge Charlie faced was to teach these re-entry students the program's required statistics courses.

One student in an early MPVM class described Charlie's approach of introducing statistics through subjects and issues understood by these veterinarians. He would first discuss the biology of some particular disease condition, such as why calves placed next to the diesel exhaust on a livestock truck ("smoker calves") more frequently experienced pneumonia after arriving at a feedlot than those located farther from the exhaust. He built his store of examples and his understanding of the underlying medicine and biology from the numerous occasions when students and faculty consulted with him for statistical advice. He would use these real-life cases to first catch the interest of the classroom students and then lead them through the logical questions that emerged once they had an understanding of the problem. He made sure the students understood what question should be asked, what comparisons would be appropriate to answer the question, and what information was needed to make the comparisons. In this way, students became so engaged and interested in the problem they could hardly wait to do the statistics and find the answer to the puzzle. A more recent student confirmed that "Charlie easily and excellently bridged the fields of statistics and the biological sciences."

As he encountered students, Charlie personally showed an understanding of the diverse cultures among them in the MPVM classes, and he met each student as an individual. A careful listener, he assessed the student's needs and then was very willing to guide the problem solving but not willing to become the problem solver himself. "I believe Charlie left every student convinced there really was a solution to his needs," said one former student.

Charlie always was a model in his expectations and work ethic. Frequently, he graded exams all night so students would have them returned by 8 a.m. the following morning. He expected assignments to be submitted on time and tolerated no complaints about long and rigorous exams.

Consistent with his character, Charlie would give brief lectures on honesty when he suspected cheating in the classroom. Here, too, his expectations were clear.

COLLABORATION

Charlie was much sought after as a collaborator as evidenced by his 200 publications, which are nearly exclusively collaborative in nature. He also collaborated with Calvin Schwabe and Hans Riemann on the first text on veterinary epidemiology, "Epidemiology in Veterinary Practice".

Jess Krause recounted, "My first recollection of Charlie Franti was that he communicated mostly with his eyes... Our conversations were always sort of on the short side since Charlie excelled in word sparing. But, when I needed an answer, he gave one and it always made sense..."

"It was in the Yolo County household survey of 1970/71 that Charlie suggested adding questions on pets. Later, we published several papers on the relation of pets to health, an area that Charlie really liked to study.

"I guess my strongest recollection of Charlie was that of a gentleman, extremely conscientious of and sensitive to the needs and aspirations of people around him. He was mindful that young faculty need mentoring, not so much on their technical skills, but on how to understand how the University worked."

Gerry Ling reflected, "Charlie was a valuable professional colleague because he would contribute greatly to the design and data analysis of clinical investigations through his extensive knowledge of both statistics and biology. His ability to write was very helpful as well.... He always made it a point to look up, read and critically evaluate the relevant literature pertaining to the topics of whatever manuscript we were working on. He was able to offer numerous suggestions regarding presentation of the findings to make them more effective and to streamline their passage through the peer review process to publication."

CONTRIBUTION TO UCD BASEBALL/ SOCCER FACILITY

Charlie was one of a very few individuals who remained dedicated for the nearly 15 years it took to build what is now the baseball/ soccer complex on campus.

In the beginning, Charlie would show up unannounced, with his short-handled shovel, and, without so much as a comment, start working. It was not clear how he knew what needed to be done, but Charlie always saw the need and worked with incredible intensity. As time went on, Charlie became more sociable until he was, without a doubt, one of the leaders.

As work progressed over many summers, the interest group became closer, and Charlie's dedication, maybe obsession, grew to the point where he took personal pride in the quality of the outcome. Aside from the incredible amount of time he spent in hard physical labor with his shovel and buckets of dirt, Charlie utilized his analytical skills to make sure that the project stayed level. As concrete was poured in layers for the seats, a task like stacking uneven blocks, there was real potential to get off plane. Charlie's meticulous records and attention to adjustment were amazing. The project, which was over 500 feet long and 12 rows high, is off by less than 1½ inches from end to end. This was accomplished with Charlie's toy level, dubbed by Charlie as his solar level, and his insistence that adjustments of 1/8th inch or 1/16th inch be made along the way.

It is estimated that Charlie devoted over 10,000 hours to the project. When asked one hot summer afternoon, Charlie said, "It gives me great satisfaction to know that after I'm dead and gone, kids will be here playing, and their parents will be watching."

Charlie had a very broad interest in biology. He participated in several wildlife disease surveys and he proved to be an expert trapper. Charlie's interest in biology was reflected in his many beautiful animal woodcarvings, particularly his birds; he won several prizes for them.

Thomas Farver
Gerald Ling
Richard McCapes
Hans Riemann