David Much
1944-2014

Thanks for this opportunity to say a few words about my dear friend and wing man, David Much. I’m grateful to all of you for sharing this part of your evening to recognize and celebrate David’s 33 years of contributions to the Biology Department, Muhlenberg College and all of the people whose lives have been touched by his work and friendship.

I first met David when I interviewed here back in 2001. He had an armadillo sitting next to his desk. Stuffed, yes, but it was definitely a live armadillo at one point in its career. Not your typical decorative accent… but this stuffed armadillo eventually led us into some really interesting conversations. Turns out, armadillos are the reservoir host for the germs that cause leprosy in people.

About 400 years ago, somebody came over from Europe and somehow passed the offending germs to a North American armadillo. These varmints have been scurrying around, eating subterranean grubs ever since, carrying the bacteria, apparently no worse for the wear. As David told me, leprosy bacteria are extremely hard to grow in a Petri dish, but armadillos have a low body temperature and an immune system that allows the microbes to thrive. Something to think about, next time you order the armadillo entree.

This is just an example of how a typical conversation with David was often an adventure into something really strange, fascinating and unexpected. His enthusiasm for microbes was literally, infectious.

Bruce Wightman also remembers David from his interview, back in 1996.

“He walked me down to Chew Street the evening of the end of my interview to await my father who was picking me up. I remember it very well. He talked about movies and free popcorn and Woodstock. And I thought that if I came to work at Muhlenberg, it would be great to have a nice version of George Costanza as a friend and colleague.”

David grew up in Philadelphia. Stories of his parents loading the kids into the car for visits with family in Miami, still a relatively small town, were very, very funny. But only as they were told by David. As a student at Chester High school, David honed his craft in what Tom Cartelli describes as a “kibitzer in the best Philadelphia/New York mode.”

David earned his B.S. in Biology from Temple University, graduating in 1965. That same year, Bob Dylan went electric with the Subterranean Homesick Blues.

David then pursued his Masters in Microbiology at Thomas Jefferson University, graduating in 1967. That same year, Bob Dylan penned “All along the Watchtower,” at his home in Woodstock, a song later made famous by Jimi Hendrix.

The reason I mention this, is that our other Dylanologist, Jim Bloom agreed with David that these brilliantly understated lyrics were among Bob Dylan’s best.
David continued to earn his PhD in Microbiology at Jefferson, graduating in 1971. This was one year after Bob Dylan was upstaged by a chorus of periodical cicadas. The event was immortalized in Dylan’s song “Day of the Locusts”, and something I loved to tease David about.

At Jefferson University, working in the lab of Dr. Ihor Zajac, David did pioneering work in virology and the brand new field of immunology. Among other things, his research explored how the polio virus invades our cells. One of his papers, published in the Journal of General Virology was cited least 56 times in top journals such as Nature and The Lancet for an additional 25 years. Given the explosive growth of immunology as a field, this remains a major accomplishment.

Upon his graduation, he was awarded a National Institutes of Health post-doctoral Fellowship in Immunology at New York University Medical School.

I can only imagine 1971 must have been exciting time to be living in the City. At this amazing time and place, David made the best decision of his life, to marry the wonderful Jane Hersohn, and they remained happily married for the next 43 years. Mazel-tov.

David loved to talk about his days at NYU. Mostly he would make fun of me because nowadays I can just buy reagents off the shelf that took him weeks to prepare from scratch. It didn’t serve as any consolation when I told him that the bulk of my PhD research can now be done 30,000 times over in 30 minutes… by a robot.

After his NIH fellowship at NYU, David taught at Princeton University, Franklin and Marshall College and Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth. I’m guessing that’s where he acquired the desiccated armadillo.

I’m sure that his proudest moment of the late 1970’s would be his sharing with Jane, the joy of the birth his of his son, Jason. Family was so important to him, and always at the top of his mind. This is what I have heard from so many of my Muhlenberg colleagues over the past days and is what I know to be true.

In 1980, Muhlenberg College was successful in recruiting David Much to join their ranks. Mind you, this was two years before Billy Joel put Allentown on the map. Just surmising, but maybe an advantage of his years in Texas was to help him feel relatively more at home in the valley of scrapple and pies: The Hess’s strawberry sky-high and the shoo-fly.

Still, adapting to Allentown was enough of a culture shock that David and the other urbane members of his cohort, Tom Cartelli and Ted Schick, bonded and remain close friends. At first, strangers in a strange land, but strangers no more.

At Muhlenberg, David cultivated a very active research program with external funding from the Dorothy Rider Pool Trust. His collaborative work led to at least ten research publications and numerous presentations on the national and international stage.

His work focused on the screening, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Especially among women and populations with limited access to health care, like prison inmates and migrant workers. His research helped inform the Centers for Disease Control as to whether Chlamydia should be a reportable disease in the State of Pennsylvania.
According to his friend and colleague of 36 years, Dr. Johnson Martin:

“David and I worked together on a number of projects but the most significant in my mind was establishing the FIRST EVER epidemiologic link between two countries (Mexico and the US) for the purpose of disease control and prevention in shared civilian populations. It still stands as a model of what can be done when the provision of health care is seen as a humanitarian right and not a business serving the privileged.”

David was linking health and social justice, before it was cool.
Even before there was a “Theory of Connectivity”.

David mentored dozens of students in independent research. One project, provided evidence of bacterial contamination at Lake Muhlenberg, way back in 1985. This is amusing because people are still showing the lake is rife with *E. coli*, and the dam is still there!

When I was offered the position here in 2001, David generously gave up a chunk of his research lab, so that plant-ops could build a room for me to keep my mosquitoes. Having come from a series of institutions where real estate was jealously guarded, I came to Muhlenberg College knowing that things were going to be very different. David lacked my enthusiasm for mosquitoes – too much time in South Florida and the Jersey Shore- but I really do appreciate the generosity that he shared with me and others.

Shortly after he was hired, Bruce Wightman had the opportunity to work with David’s son Jason, who once summered in Bruce’s lab back in 1997. According to Bruce, Jason was very bright, energetic and motivated. He was immensely successful. Bruce’s very first publication from his own lab was, in fact, Much et al., 2000. It was the very first description of a gene that causes inherited blindness in humans when defective. Jason went on to work with a renowned scientist at UCSF before eventually heading to medical school at Penn and becoming a practicing board certified ophthalmologist.

No remembrance of David’s life would not be complete without some words about his love of teaching. I am going to metaphorically hand the podium over to paraphrase the words of some of his former students.

**Adam Schlauch**, currently a rising senior wrote:

“Dr. Much offers more than just knowledge to his students. One of the best memories I have with Dr. Much is when he needed me to make a large quantity of agar plates and other reagents for the “unknowns” lab. It was a lot of prep and I had no problem doing it, especially for Dr. Much. He must have thanked me a dozen times, and also called me a "great friend". It might not seem like much, but the sincerity in his voice was unforgettable.”

“In class, he enjoyed making us laugh. At end of the lacrosse season, I broke my thumb and was unable to play in the last game. I was devastated and did not enjoy talking about how it happened. During one of the last microbiology classes, he stopped himself in the middle of what he was talking about and said, "Hey class - did you hear about Adam's thumb?" He said, "Go on, Adam, tell them what happened." I started talking about how I got hit with a lacrosse ball in practice…”
Dr. Much must have realized that I was not enjoying talking about it because he stopped me and said, ‘Adam, it's okay, you don't have to be modest. The true story is that he beat up some guy that was trying to steal a purse from an elderly woman. He got the purse back but broke his thumb in the process.’ Dr. Much managed to cheer me up, even in a really tough situation. He is just that kind of guy.”

“Dr. Much taught me that with enough hard work, anything can be accomplished. He would question me whenever I got less than a 100% on his tests. The more important thing that he taught me was that in the process of working hard, you have to step back and enjoy the passion you have for science. Knowledge is only truly useful if you can share it with others. I miss discussing labs with him, but I know that I spent just enough time with him to be able to carry the spirit of his character and his lessons with me. He is truly unforgettable.”

James Gravener ‘12 wrote:

“Dr. Much was a great professor, a research mentor and most importantly he was a true friend. Whether we were discussing T-cell differentiation, Staph infections, or the more pressing issue of how to set up his new Bluetooth headphones with his iPhone, Dr. Much was always around to talk. Our mutual interests in technology, immunology and microbiology, made hours of conversation feel more like minutes. His office and lab became a sort of sanctuary to me, and over the years he offered countless anecdotes and endless stories from his younger years. Dr. Much made it possible for me to pursue my own interests in research and helped me to develop ideas that still help me to this day in my continuing education. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Much and will never forget the lessons that he thought me both in and out of the classroom.”

Brian Cocca ’97 wrote:

“My first experience with David was in the Principles of Biology course during my freshman year. David provided a primer into microbiology and immunology. There, I crystallized the idea of what I wanted to be when I grew up. Call it one of those inflection points in your life, where your personal space-time continuum shifts in a whole other direction.

At my earliest possibility, I registered for his microbiology course. It was here that David and I came to know each other. I bugged him repeatedly about potentially assisting him in his epidemiology research with the migrant farm workers. I believe he came to understand that I was serious about studying microbiology, and he offered me the consolation prize of being the lab assistant, where I could spend my Thursday evenings sterilizing lab equipment and making new media for the Friday’s labs. Since he generally worked late, I spent many an evening in his office just socializing. He had a dry sense of humor that I could relate to. He did his best to offer life coach services. It was during these nights where we found commonality and developed a close friendship and bond.

In the following spring semester, I was one of just eight or so students brave enough to take his immunology class. It was just one of those courses where students generally feared to tread, for fear of knocking your cumulative GPA down a few notches. We all bonded through common
mental trauma of the difficulty of the subject matter. Later, we all designed t-shirts saying “I Survived Immunology at Muhlenberg College,” which we wore proudly at the end of the semester.

David challenged me to take on graduate studies in Immunology, so I entered the Immunology program at Hahnemann University and, 5 years later, earned my Ph.D. David was my inspiration throughout my graduate studies, and I can say honestly that he had me well prepared for the rigors of graduate studies and my research.

It’s strange, but you have to wonder how my life would have turned out without David. I can say that whatever it would have looked like, I would not have enjoyed the success and confidence he inspired in me.

I often view myself as an amalgam of my many teachers, and David is a big part of that amalgam. He will be missed, but never forgotten. His teaching legacy will live on in the knowledge I bring to my work and share with others every day.”

A little more about his teaching…

David taught Microbiology courses for his entire Muhlenberg career. At least for all the years that I knew him, the urgency of his students’ microbial encounters would reach their frenzied climax around the time that their “unknown” projects were due. In these projects, they were given a colony of bacteria that they needed to identify using a battery of biochemical tests. It is challenging, since microbes do not read biochemistry textbooks, and do not always behave. His students would break a sweat, but only in the best liberal arts tradition of critical thinking and analytical problem solving.

Since 1994, David taught a Muhlenberg Scholars course for non-science majors that revolved around the Bubonic Plague. In addition to the scientific background, students discussed literary accounts of several different plagues, reading original passages from Boccacio, Defoe, and Camus. Readings from Phillip Roth’s 2010 novel, Nemesis, on a modern plague of polio in 1944 connected with David’s own graduate research on polio at NYU.

His most recent project, now cut short, was to translate his work on this class into a book-length project. As David put it: “The very topic asks a number of questions relating to the nature of destiny and the human condition.”

Just a little more about David and his collegial friendships…

I got to know David better than ever after we moved into the New Science Building back in 2006. Our offices were situated across the hall in the same wing of the second floor. This is when he started to call me his “wing man”, a reference to the film, Top Gun.

I remember one afternoon, how I was getting really frustrated by one of my advisees who kept skipping advising appointments, among other annoyances. I must have been kvetching to David, when he stopped me mid-sentence and said… “Marten, how much longer are you planning on doing this job?” That’s all he needed to say and it still helps me keep things in perspective at those certain “special moments” of the semester.
Most Thursday nights, David made time to go the movies with a friend, often Jim Marshall. There is a funny and poignant story involving David, Jim, some applause and free popcorn. You will have to ask Jim to tell you that story.

For many years, every Friday, David nucleated a cluster of close friends, who met for lunch at Syb’s. Referred to by their wives as the “Jolly Boys” they included Bob Wind, John Malsberger, Jim Marshall, Ted Schick and Rohini Sinha. “Less jolly than thou,” but often present, was Tom Cartelli.

I think this is important to remember. Although David was “addicted” to a vast array of electronic gadgets, and was totally at home in the age of texting and Facebook, he understood the importance of personal connections and being present with his friends.

David thoroughly enjoyed his summer visits to France, surely enhanced by Jane’s fluency in French. He often ventured back to South Florida over spring break. There is a very funny story about the time he met our Lab Manager, Diane Dologite had her husband Gary, for lunch at a restaurant near Miami Beach. It involved a parking ticket and much ensuing hilarity, but you’ll have to ask Diane about the details.

I know that David really enjoyed driving down to his family condo down the shore at Margate. I can see him and Jane, flying down the Atlantic City Expressway in the Miyata, accompanied by the collected works of Barry Manilow. At Margate, on the beach he especially loved the lighting around dusk, which he called the “sweet light”.

I’ll close with some words of Bob Dylan, as suggested by Jim Bloom

   “There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke.
       But you and I, we’ve been through that”

David was devoted to his family. He was a loving son, brother, husband, father, grandfather and grandfather-to-be… any day now.

Thank you, David for your friendship, your work for the College, and for all you have done to make the world a better place.