

Larry L. Ewing: A Friend and Colleague Remembered (1936–1990)



Larry L. Ewing

Larry was born on a farm in Valley, Nebraska, on July 10, 1936. With his wife Aggie, Larry left Valley in 1954 to enter the University of Nebraska, from which he graduated with a B.S. from the School of Agriculture in 1958. In 1958, he began Ph.D. study in reproductive physiology at the University of Illinois, School of Dairy Science, under Dr. N.L. VanDenmark. Three papers resulted from his thesis, the first being “Factors Affecting Testicular Metabolism and Function? A Simplified Perfusion Technique for Short-Term Maintenance of Rabbit Testis.” This paper was the first of many on the structural and biosynthetic properties of the Leydig cell.

In 1962, when he was only 26 years old and without having had postdoctoral experience, Larry joined the faculty at Oklahoma State University as Assistant Professor in the Department of Physiology, College of Arts and Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. He advanced rapidly to Full Professor in 7 years. During his time at OSU, he arranged two sabbatical periods, one in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Utah for training in steroid biochemistry; and the other in the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. While at Hopkins, he met Don Coffey, and the two began a friendship that lasted until Larry’s death in 1990. Don was instrumental in attracting Larry to the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health (now the Bloomberg School of Public Health) in 1972. Larry, then 35 years old, became the youngest Professor in the School and the first Head of the Division of Reproductive Biology, which he created. He held that position until 1984.

As is true of all of us, one way that Larry can be defined is by his accomplishments. He trained 32 students and fellows. He had 140 major publications. He held a patent on the sustained release of steroids for male contraception. Over the years, he received 44 grants and was the P.I. of 20. He was among the founders, and later President, of SSR. He was Editor-in-Chief of *BOR* and, in 1987, he was the recipient of SSR’s Distinguished Service Award. Larry didn’t limit his activities only to SSR. He also was President of ASA. He served on five major editorial boards, including *Endocrinology* and the *American Journal of Physiology*. He organized national meetings for SSR, ASA, and the Testis Workshop. Not surprisingly, he was called on by NIH and other bodies to serve on study sections and numerous other panels. He was recognized at Hopkins as well, serving on 28 major committees and chairing seven, including the Appointments and Promotions Committee. He was President of the School of Public Health Faculty General Assembly (1977) and then was reelected in 1990, shortly before his death.

Simply put, Larry was an outstanding teacher, administrator, and researcher, one who made science and our profession great, fun-filled adventures; someone who, as busy as he always was, always had time. His response to requests to see him consistently was: “How about now?” He was completely honest. You always knew where you stood.

But there are other ways to describe Larry—ways that he didn’t show to many people. Larry’s passion, besides science, was sports. He played high school football, and considered his having to give it up after his graduation to have been a tragedy. He never believed that he was bright and accomplished, but rather that he got where he got by working harder than anyone. He was surprised when he got the message that someone actually could like him; that not everyone wanted something. He loved to argue. He would take any side of any argument, just for the joy of arguing (and winning).

He was, to say the least, competitive. And inside the calm, gentle scientist and friend was a beast that sometimes reared its head. Get him angry enough and he would ask you to step outside—or just swing. He was, after all, a farm boy—unafraid of anything or anyone.

Larry was a lot more complicated than most people knew. As well respected and liked as he was for the qualities that he showed to most, there was more! Much more! What he revealed to very few made him even more special—unless or until you pushed a button that made him angry!

A great guy! A great friend to those of us lucky enough to have known him that way! A winner in every way! There is not a week that goes by without a Larry Ewing story. Almost 20 years later, he remains the central personality in the Division of Reproductive Biology at Hopkins. He was that good, that powerful, that special.

Barry R. Zirkin
Johns Hopkins University