

Susan Freis
PO Box 250
Port Republic, MD 20676
410-586-2897
susanfreis@chesapeake.net

*“Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us....
All these were honored in their generations, and were the glory of their times.
—Ecclesiasticus, 44, c 180 B.C.*

August 30, 2000

Dear Family and Friends:

This month I traveled to Chicago to see Dad receive on August 23 the first *Stevo Julius Award*. This International Society of Hypertension award was for excellence in teaching. Dad was specifically honored for heading his ground breaking cooperative study in 15 Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals in the 1950s, the first double-blind, randomized drug trial ever carried out in the field of hypertension. The trials showed that drug treatment works and identified which drugs work best.

Dad's former research fellow at the VA, Dr. Jay Cohn, now head of Cardiology at the University of Minnesota Medical School at Minneapolis, nominated Dad. Novartis, a Swiss drug company, sponsored the award, which includes \$10,000 cash, naming it after Dr. Stevo Julius, who teaches at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Dr. Julius was there. He is currently heading in a drug study across 31 countries and including 15,000 patients.

I flew to Midway Airport joining Dad and Mary Rose Curtis on Tuesday morning in Chicago, a city that has special significance for each of us. Born in 1912, Dad grew up in Rogers Park on the North Side of the city. I remember visiting that rambling apartment, the living room decorated with my grandmother's graceful bone seagull and other curios, as a young child. I went to the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, climbing aboard the "El" on the South Side and riding past the Loop to visit my widowed grandfather, Roy J. Freis. Mary Rose lived in Hyde Park, the university neighborhood, while her husband, who died many years ago, was attending the Meadville Seminary. On Tuesday afternoon, Mary Rose and I took a taxi and visited the campus together. We enjoyed the Frank Lloyd Wright Robie House on 59th and Woodlawn, walked through gothic quadrangles, dropped in at the seminary, and visited the Egyptian exhibit at the Oriental Institute.

There were two ceremonial events for Dad: the special dinner on Tuesday night and the Presidential Lecture and Awards Presentation at 11:00 on Wednesday morning. As Dad said in his after-dinner remarks, "I had thought that the awards and other recognitions for the VA Cooperative Study already were given back in the seventies. I did not expect any

further honors at this late date. But I was wrong. It is wonderful to know that after 30 years, our contribution is still remembered.”

Dad did not mention the work he has done over the past few years to renew his contribution, to tackle again the stubborn problems of physician confusion on treatment options and poor patient compliance. Dad has published several articles recently (such as “Improving Treatment Effectiveness in Hypertension,” *Archives of Internal Medicine*, Volume 159, November 22, 1999). This means reviewing the research to be sure he was current, rethinking all the psychological and physical problems of treatment, and advancing a plan for a regimen (two-drug combination in a one-per-day pill, one of the drugs being a salt-diminishing diuretic) that would make it easier for doctors to prescribe what works *and* for patients to take their medicine. Anyone who has ever struggled to break through editorial filters can appreciate the achievement of Dad’s getting his ideas a fresh hearing in print at this time.

Wednesday night’s dinner was delightful. We arrived in a Lincoln Town Car, where the comfortable leather seats and genial driver—hefty as a running back and quite knowledgeable about the city—combined to sooth the nerves of the guest of honor. Dinner was held in a private room downstairs “at ‘9.’” The art deco ‘9’ restaurant was decorated in lights—blue floodlights on the curvaceous chrome bar, green floods in a light pit on the other side of a “picture” window, and sharp white lights shining through plastic sheets printed with black and white photos from the 1920s, projecting sharp images of faces onto the wall. We sat at a group of round tables, people walking over to a portable podium to speak. The food was delicious and beautifully presented, featuring thick Chicago beefsteak, perfectly aged.

At our table sat Dr. Judith Whitworth of the Medical Research Center, University of Melbourne, the vice president of the society; Dr. Stevo Julius; Jay Cohn, immediate past present of the society; his wife Syma Cohn; Dad; Mary Rose; and I. Judith Whitworth rose up to speak first, noting that all clinicians around the world remember Dad’s work. Then the drug company representative congratulated Julius and Dad. Stevo Julius said that Dad sets a high standard for future awardees, and a few others echoed that sentiment.

Then it was Dad’s turn to speak. The contrast was dramatic between Dad walking slowly across the room while favoring his back and then turning around to face the audience and delivering a vigorous short talk without notes and with perfect stage presence. He knew exactly what he wanted to say—a mixture of thanks and an understated reminder on the value of 2-drug, 1-pill therapies. When he found the photographer’s flashbulbs distracting, he quipped about it, evoking sympathetic laughter. Without missing a beat, he went back to his talk.

Jay Cohn recalled his days as a research fellow in Dad’s laboratory and with Dad’s guidance over the years, including Dad’s unsuccessful attempts to get him hooked on golf. Dad had taught him one big thing about research, Cohn said. The *question* you set for yourself is primary. “You don’t come up with a methodology and see what you can do with it. Instead, you ask what you need to find out—and then use human subjects,

animals, or whatever it takes, to answer the question.” Jay also recalled that I had spent a high school summer working under his direction at the VA research lab. “I’ve always hoped that this experience was not the reason that Susan decided not go into medicine.”

Dr. Lou Tobin, with a touch of southern humor, recalled Dad’s coaching of everyone in the golfing groups. Every January for many years in the 1980s and 1990s, Dad would escape the Washington winter to meet Dr. Tobin and his wife to play golf in Georgia. In a more serious vein, Dr. Tobin commented that we honor Dad for two achievements—the VA study and the discovery of diuretics. “We can do part of the job with any one of several drugs, but to do the whole job, to really bring the blood pressure down to normal, it takes the diuretic.”

Dad later said that he especially appreciated Lou Tobin’s remarks that— “Not only had I hit a home run with the VA study, but also he credited me with the discovery of diuretics too. I introduced diuretics into treatment and that was a very big thing.”

But the way had not been smooth. I recall something of Dad and Mom’s shock a few weeks before the 1956 annual meeting of the American Heart Association at which Dad was scheduled to report on his VA research. The organization’s then-president, Dr. Robert Wilkins, called a press conference to announce the discovery of diuretics to treat high blood pressure, but making no mention of Dad. However, Dad went on and gave his paper at the upcoming meeting. “The doctors in the audience must have figured out that I had to send AHA an abstract of my research 6 months earlier.” Dr. Wilkins soon retired, and Dad went on to win the Lasker prize for clinical medical research in 1971 “for his demonstration of the life-saving effectiveness of drugs in the treatment of ... hypertension.” And later, from AHA’s Council for High Blood Pressure he received the 1981 *Ciba Award*, and numerous other honors over the years.

On Wednesday morning, I made my way to the Chicago Navy Pier for the Presidential Lecture and Awards Ceremony. I got there early and stood to watch hundreds of conference-goers of many nationalities streaming across a large poster display area, down a carpeted ramp, and into the Grand Ballroom of the Navy Pier, a venerable high-vaulted brick structure, dimly lit with strings of white lights running up to the centerpoint. Among the five awards given that day, the *Stevo Julius Award* went to Dr. Edward David Freis and the *Astra Award* went to Dr. Edward David Frolich of the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation in New Orleans, also a former research fellow of Dad’s.

Lecturers spoke from a tall stage on one side of the circular room, an old plywood structure, perhaps built as a bandstand for the old ballroom. President of the society Dr. K.H. Rahn of Munster, Germany, walked down to give Dad his award where we sat in the first row with Ed Frolich. Dad demurred accepting it there, however, and headed up the ramp, making an even more dramatic approach to the microphone than he had the night before. One fellow commented to me that “there were a few tears out here.” We were all touched by Dad’s unselfconscious display of that classic virtue, fortitude, in the face of many years.

“I wanted to make just a few remarks,” he began, “and I won’t take long.”

Although I am being honored as a teacher, I guess I am chiefly remembered for being the chairman of the VA cooperative study which demonstrated the effectiveness of antihypertensive treatment. Being chairman of a multi-clinic trial is somewhat like being the conductor of a symphony orchestra. We are both completely dependent on our performers. After a particularly good concert, the leader often points out especially outstanding performers. In the same way let me point out a few of the outstanding participants in our Cooperative Study.

Dad then mentioned the VA statistician Lawrence Shaw, who developed the first-ever protocols for a controlled trial in the cardiovascular area; Ed Frolich of the New Orleans VA hospital; Mitch Perry of St. Louis; and Barry Materson of Miami (who went on to confirm the effectiveness of fixed-dose, 2-drug combinations in controlling blood pressure, particularly effective when one of the components is a diuretic). He also thanked Bill Cushman, Annette Fritz, Eli Ramirez, and “all the others I did not name.” Many people in the audience knew at least one of these names and some, like Barry Materson, were in the hall.

On accepting his award, Frolich recalled that as Dad’s research fellow, part of his job was to make rounds and identify possible VA patients for the ongoing study. He said that he learned to sign his own initials, EDF, exactly as Dad signed his, writing on a chart, “Send this patient down to my lab—EDF.” The five of us, Dad, Ed Frolich, Barry Materson, Mary Rose, and I sat down to lunch that mild, hazy afternoon on an outdoor table on the pier, next to the light-blue water where the Chicago River pours out to Lake Michigan.

It was a fine couple of days for all of us. It was one of those rare, high moments that draw together the many threads of a distinguished career. The award from this international society was particularly fitting since Dad’s contribution is not just to this country, but to the world.

—Susan Freis