



John Lett

December 23, 1933 - October 6, 2009

Dr. John Terrence Lett, 75, died on October 6, 2009, after residing for several days at the Lemay Health and Rehabilitation Center in Ft. Collins. He was born December 23, 1933, to John and Alice Lett in London, England, where he grew up and received his education. John received a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry and graduated with first class honors from the University of London in 1956. He subsequently earned a Ph.D. in physical organic chemistry in 1960 from the same institution. For ten years John held the position of Senior Lecturer at the Chester Beatty Research Institute at the Royal Cancer Hospital in London. In 1968 John immigrated to the United States to take the position of Professor of Radiation Biology at Colorado State University, where he taught classes and carried out research until his retirement. His research focused on the ability of cells to repair their DNA after having been damaged by radiation, and he performed some of the definitive experiments that describe cellular repair after damage by accelerated heavy ions such as would accost astronauts in flight. In particular, he studied damage to the retina and the formation of cataracts after irradiation. His research with heavy ions and with radiation-sensitive cells has impacted the theories of cellular and tissue radiosensitivity and he published more than 100 articles in scientific journals. During his tenure at CSU John carried out a year of sabbatical research at Harvard Medical School and one year at the University of California at Berkeley. He also served for 6 years as Associate Director of NASA Specialized Center of Research and Training in Radiation

Health in Consortium with the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, where the heavy ion experiments were carried out. John served as editor of *Advances in Radiation Biology* for more than 20 years and also as editor of *Radiation and Environmental Biophysics*. He also served on several committees at CSU, very notably the committee for equal opportunity in student recruitment. John was an extraordinary man in his intellect and his scientific ethics. These traits translated to his outstanding mentorship of graduate students, who admired him greatly, even after they had graduated and worked under other professors at other institutions. John treated his students with respect and had the ability to bring out the best in each one. He also engendered a sense of teamwork in his laboratory. John's knowledge extended to many subjects other than science. He was an ardent student of history, and knew, for example, the details of many battles of wars of the world and the history of many of the Native American Indian tribes. He was a lover of good music, whether it be classical, jazz, or popular, including the Beatles. He had an uncanny talent for learning languages, and picked up elements of German and Russian, even though he had no formal training in them. John married Patricia Walker in England in 1956. She bore him a son, Mark, who survives him and lives in Northern England. He is also survived by two grandsons, Michael and Daniel. John leaves his dear friends, Ursula K. Ehmann and Ann B. Cox, his special caregivers Gloria and Carmen, who became part of his family, as well as his admiring and loyal students. A service and Celebration will be held Wednesday, December 9 at 1:00 PM, at Foothills Unitarian Church, 1815 Yorktown Ave, Fort Collins, CO. A reception will follow.

Tribute Wall



“ *John Lett*

October 25, 2022 at 06:14 PM



“ *I found this late, but John was my uncle in England. His son Mark and I were cousins close in age, his wife Patricia was my father's (Peter Walker) sister - now both deceased. My memories of uncle John was of a very scary man (although I was under 10) but who was obviously extremely intelligent . He used to stay up late with my Dad playing chess or cards (I don't think my Dad ever won). When he left to live in America, Mark used to visit him and came back with fantastic stories, Mark told me he worked for NASA (this was during the late 60's) and I thought he would be walking on the moon shortly.*

Sadly I lost touch with Mark and didn't know uncle John had died until last year.

Steve Walker - London.

Steve - July 30, 2018 at 01:00 PM

KW

“ I just found this page and I am happy to share memories about John T Lett, and condolences to his family and to Ann and Ursula. I met John as a new graduate student in 1985, and less than 5 minutes after sitting down in his office, he told me I picked the wrong program because I was too smart. No one had ever told me I was too smart about anything before, and it was the start of a self-esteem boosting learning environment. I worked with him and Dr Ann Cox on DNA repair and damage susceptibility and I was most interested in vimentin and living long-term in space. I learned alot from him and had many long, awesome, theoretical, brain-probing, outer-space colonizing discussions with John. We were big soccer fans and watched World Cup matches when we could get out of the lab. I went back to Chicago since I wanted to combine my radiation training with plant molecular biology, which I later got my PhD. I went to visit John and get his opinion often, and I taught Ann how to make a proper steak and kidney pie at his request so he would less notice my absence. I wasnt able to fly back too often but called, and he always claimed to not miss me at all. He will be always a pioneer in radiation damage at the cellular level, and taught me how to be a risk-taking fearless scientist in radiation biology. I really miss him, and always think of him in the Autumn.

Katherine Warpeha - November 07, 2016 at 02:34 PM

PB

“ John was always a gracious and supportive person for the more than 20 years that I knew him. Dr. Lett hired me in 1975 to work in the Lab while I was at CSU. He gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of computer software which is my current profession. John was an avid handball player and was very good at putting the ball in the lower corner where it could not be returned. As a poker player John’s ability to bluff on the cards was always a frustration around the table. As a student at CSU, I found John to be supportive and helpful in providing a balance between lab work and coursework. John would make the trips to Berkley interesting. One memorable trip was when we skied in chest deep powder at Alta Utah on the way back from California. John will be missed a great deal. He was a very positive influence on my life. Thanks to John for all the help and support. My deepest condolences to John’s family and friends.

Patrick Burcky - October 06, 2009 at 12:00 AM

AS

I was John's tissue-culture technician at the Chester Beatty Institute in London for a couple of years in the early '60s. He was a thoughtful and imaginative researcher a fun boss and a terrific chess-player. I found this page by accident, but am pleased to share my memories of someone who taught me a lot and who I admired.

Alan Smith - March 10, 2019 at 03:02 PM

TB

I was John's lab. technician in the mid 60's at Chester-Beatty in London. Although my career took a pathway away from research, John remained a major influence on my life and interests. I learned of John's death about a year ago and found this page only after he came to mind again and prompted further searches. I was privileged to have worked with John, albeit for such a short time.

Terry Bryant March 24th 2021

Terry Bryant - March 24, 2021 at 07:49 AM

CV

“ *When we moved to CSU in 1989 John was the first to greet us and make us feel welcome. He was an extraordinary scientist and person.*

Charles Waldren, Diane Vannais - October 06, 2009 at 12:00 AM

SW

“ *Brad and I send our condolences to John's family and those closest to him. His talents left his mark in the scientific community and will be remembered fondly by those near to him.*

Sandy Wigger - October 06, 2009 at 12:00 AM

NR

“ *John was a special person who made my life better.*

Norm Rehme - October 06, 2009 at 12:00 AM