

## IN MEMORIAM

# William R. Markesbery, MD

*“Of courage undaunted, possessing firmness and perseverance..., careful as a father of those committed to his charge, yet steady in the maintenance of order and discipline, ... honest, ... of sound understanding and a fidelity to truth so scrupulous that whatever he should report would be as certain as if seen by ourselves ...”*

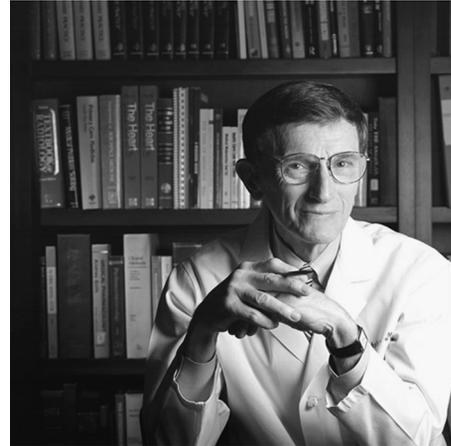
Thomas Jefferson on Meriwether Lewis (1)

William R. (Bill) Markesbery was born in Florence, KY, on September 30, 1932, and died in Lexington, KY, on January 30, 2010. Although finishing not far from where he started, during his 77 years, this gentleman scientist’s accomplishments, generosity, and decency touched many around the globe. One of Bill’s heroes was Meriwether Lewis, and this quotation from President Jefferson describing Captain Lewis seems particularly apt in also describing Bill.

After his education at Florence High School, Bill completed his undergraduate degree in Business and Economics at the University of Kentucky (UK). Bill next served in the US Army for 2 years. While stationed at Fort Shafter in Honolulu, HI, he was assigned to Tripler Army Hospital, and it was here that he developed his interest in medicine. More importantly, Bill met the love of his life, Barbara Abram, while in Hawaii. They married in 1958.

After his tour of duty, Bill returned to Kentucky, entered the first medical school class at UK in 1960, and graduated (Alpha Omega Alpha) with distinction in 1964. He then completed his residency in Neurology and fellowship in Neuropathology at Columbia University. Bill and Barbara then moved upstate, where he joined the faculty at the University of Rochester. It was here that he codiscovered what is now eponymously called *Markesbery-Griggs distal myopathy* (2).

Bill was a seventh generation Kentuckian, and his strong roots soon brought him back to the Commonwealth. He joined the faculty at UK in 1972 with appointments in the Departments of Pathology and Neurology. He became the founding director of the Sanders-Brown Center on Aging in September 1979 and soon thereafter the founding director of one of the initial 10 Alzheimer Disease Centers in the United States. Bill had an extraordinary capacity to work and was a prolific researcher. Much of his production was the result of program project grants and the Alzheimer Disease Center that were continuously funded during his career. He played a seminal role in the contribution of free radical injury to Alzheimer disease, a leadership role in the neuropathology of diseases that cause dementia including the National Institute on Aging–Reagan Institute consensus recommendations for autopsy diagnosis of Alzheimer disease (3), and a prescient role in the investigation of preclinical Alzheimer disease. Bill



William R. Markesbery, MD. Portrait by  
Mr Lee P. Thomas

published more than 400 peer-reviewed articles, multiple reviews, and a textbook entitled *Neuropathology of Dementing Disorders* (4). A recent publication ranking the top 100 Alzheimer disease researchers in the world listed Bill as 23rd (5). Bill served on the National Institute on Aging Council, the Alzheimer’s Association Scientific Advisory Board (chairperson), and the Dana Foundation. He received multiple awards recognizing his work. Examples include the Khachaturian Award (Alzheimer’s Association), the Award for Meritorious Contributions to Neuropathology (American Association of Neuropathologists), the Irving H. Shaw Award for Distinguished Service in the Field of Health Care, and the UK Library Medallion for Intellectual Achievement. Despite these impressive academic achievements, professionally, Bill was most proud of his role as clinician and his ability to serve others in need.

Bill would be embarrassed by recounting these achievements and would have some self-deprecating comment such as “I am only a country neuropathologist,” but he would want us to be sure to include that he was a deeply devoted husband, father, and grandfather. Indeed, although it was difficult to get Bill to speak about himself, he loved to talk about his family and their many accomplishments, large and small. *Passionate* is an overused term these days, but Bill also was truly passionate about UK basketball and his Porsche; all who knew him know that this is an understatement.

Bill had a set of sayings that he called *Markesbery’s Rules* that encapsulated the wisdom of his experience as an academic, although their value extends far beyond the university. Several colleagues encouraged Bill to publish his

rules, but he would just look at his shoes and smile. It is fitting to conclude with Bill Markesbery's own words:

#### Markesbery's Rules

- It's better to be the grand duke than the king
- Save your bullets
- Don't fight over the broom closet
- Don't waste emotional energy on fights you can't win
- Stay focused
- Bow your neck, bite the bullet
- Publish once a month
- Holidays are a great time to work
- Don't work for committees
- Polish your character every day

#### REFERENCES

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