When reminiscing about Thomas Dutcher, MD, people ordinarily not given to speaking in superlatives can’t seem to help but do so. “A superb lecturer,” “a marvelous teacher,” and “a consummate microphotographer” are only some of the laudatory phrases used by his colleagues to describe him.

“He was probably the nation’s best hematologic morphologist,” declares Brian Bull, MD, dean of the Loma Linda (California) School of Medicine and chair of its Department of Pathology and Human Anatomy.

“He was our mentor, and a very strong advocate for medical technologists in the Society [ASCP],” remarks Barbara Minard, MT(ASCP)SH,SI, laboratory director for Riverside Health System in Wichita, Kans.

And Deanna Klosinski, PhD, MT(ASCP)DLM, who worked with Dr Dutcher for 9 years in the laboratory at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich, pays tribute this way: “I loved him as a mentor, as a boss, as a teacher, as a friend—because he taught me that it was okay to set high standards regardless of what others do.”

Robert McKenna, MD, also an ASCP past president, explains that Dr Dutcher “developed and led modern educational programming in hematology for the ASCP.” McKenna, a professor and executive vice chair of the Department of Pathology, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, says Dr Dutcher was “the cornerstone for what has expanded into [the ASCP’s] very well-developed educational programs in hematology and hematopathology.”

**Saying It With Flowers**

Over a period of 30 years, Dr Dutcher presented numerous workshops and teleconferences for the ASCP. One of his most popular programs for medical technologists was “Hematologic Morphology for Teachers or Learners,” according to Sondra Moran, MT(ASCP), director of national meeting education activities for the ASCP.

“Dr Dutcher was a superb lecturer,” Moran adds. “He never liked to use a lectern but preferred to teach as part of the audience, while sitting at a cocktail table in the middle of the room. He had a camaraderie with the participants that enabled him to teach effectively.” She describes what was unique about his hematology programs: “He used flowers.” Dr Dutcher interspersed his photographic slides of hematology cases with slides of beautiful blossoms, each chosen because it was configured similarly to the blood cell structure just shown. On one occasion the electric power went out while he was teaching. “The projector went dead, but he just continued speaking in the pitch-dark room, as if nothing had happened,” Moran recalls.

Klosinski, now a laboratory management and training consultant who lives in Bloomfield Hills, Mich, agrees. “He was a marvelous teacher,” she says. “It always amazed me that he could fill a huge lecture room year after year—multiple times every year—talking about big blue cells and little blue cells—the leukemia cells—and about hematology in general, for a whole-day seminar, talking 6 to 7 hours!”
**A Gift for Words and Organization**

Dr. Dutcher had a flair for using words that made his teaching interesting and challenged the learner, Klosinski relates. For example, he entitled one of his seminars “Pastiche of Anemia.”

McKenna explains that another reason for Dr. Dutcher's strong teaching reputation was that “he was very well organized in his approach. He seemed to have a really good feel for what was important and what people needed to know in order to perform well in their profession.”

“[Dr Dutcher] educated an entire generation of morphologists in the field of hematology.”
—Brian Bull, MD

In 1989 Dr. Dutcher “retired” and moved to Redlands, Calif., with his wife Freda, but he continued to teach and practice medicine. He presented still more ASCP workshops, became clinical professor of pathology and human anatomy at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine, and served on the medical staff of Jerry L. Pettis Memorial VA Medical Center in Loma Linda.

“[Dr Dutcher] educated an entire generation of morphologists in the field of hematology,” says Bull, who recruited his longtime associate to the medical school faculty. He says that Dr. Dutcher’s classes and “voluntary conferences” at Loma Linda were highly valued by the medical students and residents.

**Collecting Cases**

A “very competent diagnostician,” Dr. Dutcher was “almost a compulsive collector of hematological oddities and rare cases,” says Bull. In fact, his name was given to a particular type of abnormal blood cell inclusion that he described in his writings. This “Dutcher body” is helpful in diagnosing certain kinds of cancer, Bull explains.

Moran says Dr. Dutcher was an “expert” in photography, taking, throughout his career, “superb” hematology pictures for use in his teaching. He shared what he had learned in his workshop entitled “Secrets of Great Photomicrography.”

Says Bull, “He probably had the world’s finest selection of photographic slides of changes characteristic of various disease states.” He had built this collection by photographing difficult cases sent to him for diagnosis. Bull relates that in his later years, Dr. Dutcher spent time transferring these images to CD-ROM, “so that all of the residents being trained in hematomorphology could have their own subset of his collection.”

Debra Walsh, the ASCP’s director of executive office services, points out that Dr. Dutcher supported the organization’s establishment of an annual medical photography competition and served as one of its judges for almost 20 years.

**Technologists’ Friend**

Of the people who worked with and learned from Dr. Dutcher, perhaps those who speak of him with the most gratitude are medical technologists. Says...
Klosinski: “I believe that Dr Dutcher, more so than any other pathologist that I have known, promoted the professionalism of technologists, technicians, and phlebotomists.”

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—Deanna Klosinski, PhD, MT(ASCP)DLM

Dr Dutcher had been a medical technologist before he became a pathologist, Minard remembers. He acted as both a leader and a facilitator, she says, as the technologists and other laboratory personnel sought an increased identity in the organization. Although membership in ASCP had been opened to medical technologists “in the late 1960s or early 70s,” it was not until the 1980s that a technologist served on the Board of Directors, Minard explains. In the late 1970s a committee of pathologists and technologists was formed to examine technologists’ organizational needs and involvement. The Committee for Associate Affiliate Member Activities (CAAMA) was first chaired by Dr Dutcher. Minard served on the committee.

“Most of the early efforts were educational activities for our members, and some benefit programs,” recalls Minard. “Dr Dutcher was one of the instructors who helped out with these. He took part with us in an awful lot of late-night brainstorming sessions. Dr Dutcher was instrumental in establishing the ‘Medical Technologist of the Year’ award.”

“We operated as a committee until 1981, when it became the Commission of Associate Member Activities (CAMA),” Minard relates. Dr Dutcher stepped down from chairmanship in the mid-1980s, when he was elected ASCP vice president. At that point Minard became commissioner as well as the first medical technologist to serve on the ASCP Board. In 1986, CAMA became the Associate Member Section.

“From the standpoint of writing bylaws and overcoming political obstacles, Dr Dutcher very definitely provided support on the Board for us,” Minard says.

A Respected Mentor
Klosinski adds, “Dr Dutcher stood firm on the significant role that technologists, technicians, and phlebotomists play in working with pathologists.” And he inspired deep loyalty on the part of these colleagues as well as his fellow pathologists, she says. “Even when someone didn’t agree with him, there was always a mutual respect.”

She speculates with confidence that today—a decade after his retirement from William Beaumont Hospital—“many people who worked with him there would still say, ‘He was the most influential person in how I work in the laboratory— in what I do and what I believe is the right thing to do.”

“Dr Dutcher was a personal friend of mine, as well as a professional friend,” Klosinski concludes in a voice touched with fondness and pride. When it comes to superlatives, what more can be said?

Sue Ellen Wilcox is a freelance writer who lives in Ames, Iowa. She teaches journalism at Iowa State University.