Dr. Majzoub’s Introduction - May 1, 2011

I am pleased to introduce Dr. John Fielding Crigler, Jr, the 2011 Judson van Wyk Prize awardee of our Pediatric Endocrine Society, formerly known as the Lawson Wilkins Pediatric Endocrine Society. In this introductory sentence of my introduction to Dr. Crigler are two relevant associations.

The first is that between John Crigler and Lawson Wilkins. As some of you know, John Crigler was among Lawson Wilkins’ first fellows, or “Associates”, as Dr. Wilkins liked to call them. In fact, after completing his pediatrics residency at Johns Hopkins in 1950 (the year that I was born), John and Claude Migeon were Dr. Wilkins’ first two fellows. John taught the English language to Claude, who had just arrived off the boat from France, which is no doubt why Claude speaks with such a charming Southern drawl. That defects in individual genes could cause specific diseases was quite clear by the time that Drs. Wilkins and Fuller Albright simultaneously discovered the effective treatment of congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) by glucocorticoids. Working as a fellow with Dr. Wilkins, John Crigler defined, in a seminal 1952 paper reporting studies of infants with salt-losing CAH, the therapeutic response to dietary salt loading without and with the administration of cortisone acetate, intramuscularly and orally administered at different dosages and schedules, its advantages over corticosterone, and the evidence for the need of adequate salt intake in infancy and for a second, sodium-retaining hormone, which was discovered later that year and named aldosterone. These meticulous, longitudinal studies are models of clinical investigation. In 1998, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first publication of Pediatrics, Melvin Grumbach was asked to select the most important endocrine paper from among the over 400 publications in the field of endocrinology in that journal, and chose this one.

The second association I would like to note is that between John Crigler and Judson Van Wyk. John and his wife, Mary Adele, first met Dr. Van Wyk and Persis, his wife, during their house officer years at Harriet Lane Home of the Johns Hopkins Hospital. Both were Johns Hopkins School of Medicine graduates, and following their general pediatric training, served as “Associates” of Dr. Wilkins. These common educational and training experiences and, especially, the time with Dr. Wilkins and his associates, were the foundation for their lifelong warm and admiring personal and professional relationships, especially, in the years of the founding and organization of the LWPEs, at annual scientific pediatric and endocrine society meetings and, on very special occasions, wonderful visits to each other’s homes. My wife, Kathy, and I, were honored to be invited by the Criglers to a dinner at the Wellesley College Club 20 years ago, during which we met the Van Wyks, and were entertained by the easy camaraderie and playful but serious intellectual exchanges that flew between these two great leaders of our field.

Dr. Crigler was a founding member of the Lawson Wilkins Pediatric Endocrine Society and its eighth president. He also founded the Division of Endocrinology at Boston Children’s Hospital 56 years ago. Using meticulous methodology learned as
a fellow, he made important contributions to the pathophysiology and treatment of CAH, glycogen storage diseases, precocious puberty and several other disorders. During his tenure he trained over 70 endocrinologists, most of who have remained in academic medicine as leaders in their fields around the United States and the world. Four years ago, the John F. Crigler, Jr. and Mary Adele Sippel Crigler Chair in Pediatric Endocrinology was created at our institution to honor John and Mary Adele for their many contributions.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. John Fielding Crigler, Jr, to accept the 2011 Judson Van Wyk Prize of our Pediatric Endocrine Society.
John F. Crigler, Jr.
2011 Judson J. Van Wyk prize, an award of the Pediatric Endocrine Society for career achievement in pediatric endocrinology -Accepting comments – May 1, 2011 References for these comments – “Stumbling on Happiness” (Daniel Gilbert), “A Fortunate Life” (A. B. Facey) and “the wonder of it all” (my reaction to receiving the Van Wyk Prize)

Dr. Allen, Dr. Majzoub, members of the Pediatric Endocrine Society, family, and guests.
I am greatly honored to be the recipient of the 2011 and 6th Judson J. Van Wyk prize and to join the five distinguished colleagues and personal friends who have preceded me in receiving this high honor. Quoting from the society’s website, this Pediatric Endocrine Society’s most prestigious award, was established in recognition of a career devoted to the ideals exemplified by Dr. Van Wyk: “scientific excellence, leadership, integrity and dedication to the health of children”

These, indeed, are very high ideals which I am sure most of us hope to fulfill, but, of course, which can only be accomplished with enormous help from many others of very diverse talent, interest and opportunity. Certainly, this is so in my case. And from my knowledge of their remarkable careers, I know has been the experience of Dr Van Wyk and the other recipients of this wonderful and most deserved tribute to him by the Society. So with this point very much in mind, I am thrilled to accept this remarkable recognition in the name of all the many individuals that have been essential to making it possible for me to come close to emulating these “ideals exemplified by Dr. Van Wyk”.

To illustrate what I mean about the chance but critical role of others in one’s accomplishments, I want to begin my brief remarks by taking a look back---sharing a personal perspective on some of what you heard from Dr. Majzoub.

As I prepared these remarks, the phrases that kept recurring to me were (to borrow from some favorite authors): “stumbling on happiness” and “a fortunate life” and, from my own reaction to receiving the Van Wyk Prize, “the wonder of it all”. A pivotal moment for both my life and career was September 1939. Virtually the same day I entered Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and, as I was moving my sister into her new residence with friends of our family, I met the young woman who 4 years later would become my partner for life. All of the events that took place in these 4 short years of courtship and medical school and 9 month medical internship in Boston contained momentous chunks of great good fortune, primarily
through meeting many remarkable individuals who played roles in our subsequent life and influenced my choice of a future career.

In May of 1946, after I returned from service in the navy in WWii, I decided to consider a career in pediatrics following from my contact with young patients with infectious diseases during medical school and internship in medicine. When I approached Dr. Park, chair of pediatrics at Hopkins, to my surprise and joy, he offered me an internship! Thus began my career in pediatrics and academic medicine. Dr. Majzoub has spoken of my early years at Hopkins with Dr. Lawson Wilkins. This is where I first met Jud van Wyk when he joined the house staff the year I was resident.

Hard to believe now, but in the course of my four years in general pediatrics, the subspeciality that I originally thought I’d be least likely to pick for a life-long career was pediatric endocrinology! I was inspired by Dr. Wilkins and the remarkable vision and energy he had for what might be possible through development of the new subspeciality of pediatric endocrinology.

I’d like to reflect on two experiences from this time, mentioned by Dr. Majzoub. The opportunities that each presented for patient and family care over time linked with creative and impactful clinical research was formative for me and deeply impacted my subsequent career.

First was the discovery of a group of infants of related families from southern Maryland who presented clinically with a severe, non-hemolytic, indirect hyperbilirubinemia and neurological manifestations of kernicterus. This disorder subsequently was found to be caused by an inborn error in bilirubin metabolism inherited as an autosomal recessive abnormality. Dr. Victor Najjar and I published our first paper on 7 infants with this disorder in 1952. Following these families with children and later adults with this rare disorder over time enabled further breakthroughs in understanding and treatment of the syndrome. In the mid-1960s, we identifying a group of these infants whose hepatic glucuronyl transferase activity was induced by phenobarbitol with a significant decrease in serum concentrations of unconjugated bilirubin thus protecting them from kernicterus. Then, in the later years of my career, we saw the long-term effectiveness of light therapy and liver transplantation in the group of patients followed by Dr. Holmes Morton and his colleagues at the Clinic for Special Children in Strasburg PA.

The second experience was during my time as an associate with Dr Wilkins shortly after he and his associates first observed the suppression of adrenal androgens with
100mg of cortisone acetate im daily for 10 days (it was all that was available to them at that time!). These results led to further prospective studies to define pharmacological requirements for treatment with cortisone of other patients with non-salt-losing CAH followed in the endocrine clinic and, during my tenure, in three infants with salt-losing in which I was significantly involved.

The studies of these two inherited disorders, my first significant experiences with clinical research, were exciting but made me aware of a need for further training in basic science, which brought me back to Boston where I had had my internship in medicine before entering the Navy. Encouraged by Dr. Wilkins, I obtained a fellowship in 1951 to study biophysical chemistry related to molecular and cell biology at MIT.

During the first of my 3-1/2 years at MIT, I received a call from Dr. Janeway to discuss joining the Department of Medicine at the Children’s Hospital and Department of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School to establish an academic program involving patient care, teaching and research in pediatric endocrinology. In accepting this offer, I was fortunate to receive the great and challenging opportunity to organize and develop this new division in the Department of Medicine at Children’s Hospital.

Here’s a snapshot to capture that time: when I arrived at Children’s Hospital on January 1, 1955, I was given an office in the laboratory study building and assigned relatively new laboratory space elsewhere for the division of endocrinology and my research. Weekly staff meetings were held in Dr. Janeway’s office for the full complement of senior staff physicians of the Department of Medicine—all 10 of us!

No snapshot, however, can capture the inspiration, hope and hard work of that time. From my original conversations with Dr. Janeway, I knew we shared a common vision, which was to build a program in endocrinology to serve not only the clinical needs of the hospital to care for its patients, but also to establish a competitive training and research program. For me this work promised to bring together what became my three passions: meticulous care for children in the context of their families, research to extend our knowledge and our ability to improve and heal lives, and, finally, teaching, so that our knowledge and its application will continue to grow into the future.

The initial goals were accomplished in their essentials over the first 10 years, culminating in 1965 with the formal establishment of the program as a Division of
the Department of Medicine and the award by the NIH of the General Clinical Research Center, which added essential inpatient and laboratory resources for the hospital.

Of course, with great growth of the institutions in staff, facilities and research opportunities, there has been almost log-rhythmic change in all programs over subsequent years, my 24 as chief and Dr Majzoub’s 22 years to date. What has been made possible is contained in articles and books too many to review today in these comments of acceptance of this wonderful honor of the Society’s recognition of Dr. Van Wyk.

I end where I began, with the wonder of it all. I am so very fortunate to have had the opportunity to do this work of learning and teaching and healing. Fortunate to have had the exceptional mentors who guided my path, outstanding colleagues like Jud, and in turn to have had the incredible joy of sharing the day by day process of learning with so many in turn. It gives me untold pleasure to see what you are doing now—and to check up on the facts from time to time. I deeply value the gifts of my successor, Dr. Joe Majzoub, a cherished friend, who has taken what I began to new levels and generously welcomed my continued interest and participation. Finally, thank you to all my colleagues of the Pediatric Endocrine Society for the honor you have given me today. That too is a wonder.