



Minor "Jud" Jesser Coon

July 29, 1921 - September 5, 2018

Minor Jesser (Jud) Coon was born in Englewood, Colorado on July 29, 1921, the son of Minor Dillon Coon and Mary Margaret Jesser Coon. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, from the University of Colorado and his PhD from the University of Illinois. His research at the University of Illinois in the 1950's led to the discovery of HMG-CoA, the precursor to cholesterol synthesis. At Illinois, he met Mary Louise Newburn, who became his wife of 52 years. After several years at the University of Pennsylvania, including a sabbatical year in New York City, the family moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1955 where he began a stellar career at the University of Michigan, serving as Chair of the Department of Biological Chemistry for twenty years. Jud is best known for his pioneering work with the cytochrome P450 system, initially isolating this compound which has now become known as the metabolism system for medications, hormones, toxins, and other substances. His work on P450 is featured as a Journal of Biological Chemistry Classic. He retired in 2002 as Victor C. Vaughan Distinguished University Professor.

He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1983, a society of distinguished scholars charged with providing independent, objective advice to the nation on matters related to science and technology. He received the State of Michigan Scientist of the Year Award in 1988, among numerous other awards. Jud was editor-in-chief of *Biochemical Preparations and Microsomes*, *Drug Oxidations and Chemical Carcinogenesis*. He also served on the editorial boards of *Biochemistry*, *Molecular Pharmacology*, and the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*.²The Minor J. Coon Professorship in Biological Chemistry was established at the University of Michigan in 1991, the highest academic award that a University can bestow, which lasts as long as the University exists. He was especially humbled by his honorary degree as Doctor of Medicine, which was awarded by the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The International Conference on Cytochrome P450 was held in France in his honor on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

He served as President of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from 1991 to 1992. In the course of his productive career he published over 350 papers

with colleagues and students. He and his family spent a sabbatical year in 1961 in Zürich at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, which was a seminal experience. He was a generous mentor to many rising scientists over the years. Jud was ahead of his time with his support for women in the sciences and biochemistry in particular, a leader in true equality. The scientific process and discovery mindset sees no gender, and he embraced all discovery with eagerness. The Minor J. and Mary Lou Coon Award was established by Jud and Mary Lou and is now and will continue to be presented annually to the student at the University of Michigan in biochemistry who best exhibits excellence in research, teaching, and service. Of particular mention was Jud's willingness to openly share his research internationally in collaboration for the enrichment of science and betterment of humanity.

Both his wife, Mary Lou, and his son, Lawrence Richard Coon, died in October 2000 of unrelated causes. He is survived by a daughter Susan Louise Coon (Conrad Weiser,) and a daughter-in-law, Linda Wilkins Coon; four grandchildren: Jon Robert Svoboda (Margaret), and Jessica Ashley Preston (Craig), Sarah Weiser Davis (John), and Philip Konrad Richard Weiser(Elisabeth); four great-grandchildren: Kaitlyn Marie Preston, Robert Lawrence Preston, Camille Grace Svoboda, and William Jesser Davis, who carries on a family name.

He was a gentle, kind and wise father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Annual Halloween visits with pictures with great grandchildren in costumes, gifts of dry ice at Christmas and musical interludes on the piano were highlights of their visits together, along with many worldwide adventures and endless stories. The rock at the corner of Washtenaw Avenue and Hill Street was painted red by his grandchildren to represent the color of cytochrome P-450 on the visible light spectrum for his 80th birthday, one of many connected moments between his professional and family life.

An avid photographer and gardener, Jud also enjoyed camping with his family around the country, especially in his beloved Colorado. The entire family appreciated the frequent slide shows of their childhoods and their travels. He picked up the nickname Jud when he was doing his PhD research, using himself and fellow graduate students as research subjects, because of the song "Pore Jud is daid" from the musical Oklahoma! He was well known for his great sense of humor.

Jud joined the First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor in 1955, an outgrowth of which was an Investment Club lasting 50 years. He and Mary Lou entertained frequently in their home. He was a great opera lover, and took full advantage of the rich musical offerings in Ann Arbor and around the world.

Jud is not only survived by his loved ones, but also by the ever grateful and growing community of scientists who have benefitted from his dynamic and persistent field of study. This applies not only in the laboratory setting, but now expanding into the clinical setting of biochemical science in the new epigenetic based realm of healthcare with the application of knowledge of the cytochrome P450 system to an individual's capacity to metabolize and detoxify environmental stimuli. Jud's impact will reverberate for generations to come. Jud's last few years were in the company of close friends and family and with attentive loving care from his daughter-in-law, Linda.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the University of Michigan Minor J. and Mary Lou Coon Award or the University Music Society (UMS).

Comments



“ Jud was the best, the very best! As you may know, Jack followed Jud as Chair of Biological Chemistry, a position that Jud had held for 20 years. Our move to Ann Arbor was a joy for both of us. Jud was just down the hall from Jack's office, and Jack made many trips to Jud's office to get advice and counsel from him. Jud was a Michigan man, and the counsel he provided was always the best for the Department, the School of Medicine, and the University.

We were always impressed by Jud's warmth and kindness as well as his wisdom. In addition, we always appreciated our social interactions with Jud and Mary Lou, and we had a great tradition of having yearly dinners with Jud and his daughter Sue's family during the National Academy meetings. Jud had a great love and dedication for science, family, colleagues, and friends. He was a true gentleman and we will all miss him greatly. Our thoughts are with Sue, Linda, and family.

Jack Dixon and Claudia Kent Dixon

Jack Dixon and Claudia Kent - September 12, 2018 at 11:40 AM



“ Dear Linda and Family of Minor "Jud" Coon:

It was a great pleasure and an honor to know Jud. We met just a few months ago, at Glacier Hills. Although I was only slightly aware of his many outstanding academic accomplishments in the field of bio-chemistry what I enjoyed most about Jud was his smile, his friendship, his keen wit & quick laughter that would light up the room. Jud enjoyed social time with his friends and our staff team on the GH patio the past few months - and I will never forget his love of watermelon. We could coax Jud from his comfortable chair to join us even on warm evenings this summer when watermelon was served. :) I also enjoyed talking with him over ice cream in his room. Jud will be greatly missed. I want to take this opportunity to thank Jud's very loving family for sharing Minor "Jud" with us. Such a kind and humble man who was equally inquisitive, brilliant and engaging. He will be greatly missed by us all. ~ Kris Palmer, Activities, Birch Household/Glacier Hills

Kris Palmer - September 07, 2018 at 10:41 AM



“ Dear Susan and all Jud's Family,

Margaret and I were very sad to hear that Jud passed away. He was giant in everything he did. Best of all - he didn't act like one. He was a great mentor to me even well after I left Michigan. It was in his lab late in afternoon on the last day of December that Kim White determined that nitric oxide synthase was a P450. We were excited but not as much as Jud! When we lived on Harding Road we would pass Jud's house and see him gardening and Mary Lou helping and advising.

Teasing Jud about the Christmas light show across the street was a yearly duty of mine. We will miss him. For me he was a true guiding light about what science is and what it could be. The photo was at a very special time for me and with two of my most special friends and mentors. We are thinking of you.

Michael Marletta and Margaret Gutowski



Michael Marletta - September 06, 2018 at 02:15 PM

 “ 3 files added to the album New Album Name



Amanda Howard - September 06, 2018 at 12:15 PM

 “ It is a sad destiny for all that we must ultimately lose the great among us. However, we are fortunate to have enjoyed the privilege of sharing Jud Coon during our lifetimes, and he was fortunate to have led such an exemplary life as an honored scientist and loved human being.

-- Rudy Richardson

Rudy Richardson - September 06, 2018 at 11:15 AM

 “ Eric and I send our condolences on the passing of a great man. He achieved so much in his life and made lasting contributions to science. While he was recognized by many for his stellar scientific accomplishments, he was revered the most by his family. He will be missed by many friends as well. Our thoughts and love are with you.

Sandy & Eric Bermann - September 05, 2018 at 06:08 PM



“ It is very sad to lose such an important person from our lives.. Jud led a wonderful life and for all of us was an example of how to live. He never let difficult obstacles stop him or discourage him, but rather kept looking forward with a positive attitude. He was fair, helpful, and understanding. Of course, he was a wonderful scientist known world-wide, especially for helping to set the foundation for the study of P450 chemistry, an area extremely important in drug metabolism. In the course of his professorship and chair of the Department of Biological Chemistry at the University of Michigan, he mentored many students, most of whom have had illustrious careers in science as well. We can all be thankful for having him in our lives. He surely helped me to have a better life. I feel his loss and yet I have such gratitude for his life. I know his family and friends also strongly feel this loss, and my thoughts go out to all of you.

Dave Ballou

David Ballou - September 05, 2018 at 03:18 PM



“ Dear Linda, Susan, & others—I received the news about Jud last week. I am working on some obituary /memoir articles to be published. I have a lot of thoughts but will try to keep this brief. I was very fortunate to have had two outstanding mentors in my life, one of whom was Jud. Perhaps the finest compliment I can pay him is that I learned from him how to be a professor. His memory will live on in the lives of those who trained with him.

Fred Guengerich

Fred Guengerich - September 13, 2018 at 07:15 AM



“ I had the great fortune to be traveling in the same time-frame and universe (of cytochrome P450 genetics and genomics) with Jud, starting in February 1969, when I first met him. He was the ultimate gentleman, honest, sincere, and a great scientist. He has been on my emailing list of cutting-edge articles -- even to this month. We will all miss him greatly.

---Dan

Daniel W Nebert, Professor Emeritus, University of Cincinnati Medical Center

Daniel W NEBERT - September 19, 2018 at 11:48 AM



“ A gentleman and a scholar. Absolutely the best researcher and mentor you could work for.

Carole Smith Davis

Carole J-Smith - October 05, 2018 at 07:59 PM



“ Jud Coon to me was the greatest man of science who I have ever known, not only as the international leader for decades in Cytochrome P450 research, but as the personally kind and supportive Chairman of Biological Chemistry at the University of Michigan for decades. Jud became the Chairman when I joined in 1970, and he was so supportive of me from Assistant to Associate Professor -- in my teaching of nursing students and others, in working on the start of the Inteflex BS/MD program. He later helped with advice and support of my salary in my slow transition to full time research administration in the late 1970's -- to UM Medical School Assistant Dean for Research and to UM Assistant and

Associate Vice President for Research. He also recognized and encouraged in letters and some AA visits my transition to to the U.S. Government's Public Health Service, as Associate Director of the Office of Research Integrity (tp 2006). Thus, I have always treasured Jud and will continue to do so in recognition of his memory.

-- Dr. Alan Price

Alan Price - December 17, 2018 at 10:28 PM