

PATRICK P. SIM, M.L.S. (1939-2010)

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Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology

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For historians and anesthesiologists, a gentle giant fell on October 14, 2010. ASA lost its longest-serving professional and most recently elected Honorary Member, the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology (WLM) lost its Paul M. Wood Distinguished Librarian Emeritus, and the world lost a consummate gentleman and scholar, Patrick P. Sim, M.L.S.

According to the Chinese zodiac, the birth in British Colonial Hong Kong of “Sim Pui-Kam” was not auspiciously timed, particularly with the looming threat of World War II. Shortly after Pearl Harbor was attacked, young Sim was forced to flee with family members to mainland China on perhaps the final departing boat before Japanese soldiers invaded. Speaking Cantonese, the youngster spent the next several years immersed in a second Chinese dialect. (So English would actually be his third language. To the very end, Librarian Sim would say that he dreamed in Chinese; hence, all *his* work in English was a labor of love for him.) When hostilities ceased, the Sim family returned to Hong Kong. The oldest of seven siblings, Sim Pui-Kam pleased his mother and his entrepreneurial father by excelling in primary schools taught in their Cantonese dialect.

His secondary schooling took place in Hong Kong’s most prestigious Catholic boys’ school, St. Joseph’s College (SJC), where most classes were conducted in English (i.e., English with an Irish accent). Here at SJC, Sim Pui-Kam was christened “Patrick” by his Irish mentors, the Lasallian Brothers – so he became known as Patrick Pui-Kam Sim. After postgraduate

studies at SJC, Patrick trained to become what Americans would call a “junior high” teacher at Northcote Training College in Hong Kong before following a colleague to the U.S. to “NEMO” – Northeast Missouri State College.

At NEMO, Patrick was inspired by medieval scholar and medical historian Arnold Zuckerman, Ph.D. More importantly, there Pat was enchanted by his future wife, a Taiwanese music major named Shiu-Mei. Among the many joys she would bring to Patrick, Shiu-Mei would bless him with two wonderful boys who would excel respectively in the sciences and the arts – Gabriel in dental science and Claude in music.

During his early years with Shiu-Mei, Patrick claimed that he learned “service with a smile” from waiting tables in smoke-filled Chinese restaurants, including ones in Chicago. He eventually saved enough money to complete his Master’s degree in Library Science at America’s most famous library school – the State University of New York at Albany, where Melvil Dewey had popularized his Dewey Decimal System. While training there, Mr. Sim also worked part-time at

the New York State Medical Library in Albany.

His first and only full-time job as a librarian began on February 16, 1971, when he began his 39-year labor of love as Librarian of the ASA’s WLM. *From 1971-88, Mr. Sim functioned as ASA’s sole reference librarian.* There was nobody else at ASA headquarters providing information on past



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policies, past publications, current references, etc., except for Mr. Sim. In his rookie year as WLM Librarian, Mr. Sim assisted in educational efforts, such as the *Residents Reading List* and *History of Anesthesiology* series. He also supervised the end-run of the WLM's *Anesthesiology Bibliography* from 1971-93. In fact, from 1971-2010, Mr. Sim provided references or supervised programs ranging from the ACA's Self-Evaluation Program to the ASA's Self-Education and Evaluation Program.

When the ASA began expanding office space for clerical personnel in the 1980s, Mr. Sim corralled larger pieces of antique apparatus into the ASA headquarter's basement, even using the furnace room for storage. Several years before ASA moved to its current location, Patrick could be observed changing exhibits in the lone "surviving" display cabinet, next to the ASA's photocopy machine. Mr. Sim safeguarded the WLM library, archival and museum collections when the ASA moved within Park Ridge from one building to the next. Patrick would eventually supervise five full-time employees.

Mr. Sim authored many articles for the ASA NEWSLETTER and for *Anesthesiology*. Behind the scenes, he assisted hundreds of domestic and international scholars, at least 72 WLM Fellows and all five WLM Laureates, with research for their publications. From 1971-2010, Patrick helped edit copy and check facts for most of the WLM's publications.

For each of the past 39 years, most scholars who made academic contributions to the history of our specialty started by consulting their local and then national anesthesia archive or library. As their work progressed, many of them contacted the world's largest anesthesia history resource, the Wood Library-Museum. At this point, they communicated by letter, e-mail or telephone, or for the privileged few, by meeting personally with the incomparable Patrick Sim.

Wherever in the world there is a person with an interest in anesthesia history, there is a person who will have had their professional life enhanced by this great facilitator. No request

was too trivial or too complex for Patrick to make a contribution. If he did not know the answer to a question, then he knew a man (or woman) who did! It would be interesting to peek into Patrick's e-mail address book because therein lurk the names of anesthesia historians from around the world, from young trainees or medical students to the eldest and legendary scholars.

Visitors fortunate enough to encounter Patrick at the WLM were able to witness this maestro put his hand on a book, a piece of archived paper or, better still, recount a story of meeting a person who answered the very question

being posed. It is difficult to imagine just how many Fellows, visitors and Laureates from all around the world have benefitted from his time (and coffee breaks). Every continent and almost every country has been blessed by Patrick's thoughtfulness and knowledge. For "strangers in a strange land," Patrick ensured that visitors' hotels were comfortable, their breakfast satisfying and their wardrobe adequate to face Chicagoland's challenging weather.

When one author (DJW) scheduled a WLM Fellowship in February, Patrick had cautioned, "David, bring a hat." Sim's words were met with "A hat ... I never wear a hat, Mr Sim." On stepping outside O'Hare Airport, that hapless WLM Fellow found a snow-covered taxi and "a wind chill that would make polar bears cry." (Fellow Wilkinson had found out the hard way why he should have listened more carefully to Librarian Sim!)

Perhaps Mr. Sim's greatest professional role was serving as a goodwill ambassador of the ASA. He invested personal time and energy into providing visitors to the ASA with a cordial smile and a helpful hand. Besides staffing ASA's book sales since 1991, Mr. Sim collaborated with other ASA divisions and foundations at the ASA Resource Center during each ASA Annual Meeting. For many anesthesiologists, Patrick Sim represented the friendly face of the ASA.



Inside the WLM's Huston Rare Book Room in 2010, WLM Librarian Patrick Sim shows off prized tomes to the curator.

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From 1971-2010, Mr. Sim fielded personally tens of thousands of phone calls and e-mails from thousands of ASA members. When asked, he provided references and advice to more than 40 past, current and future ASA presidents and their slates of officers. No living individual contacted and impacted more American anesthesiologists, from rank-and-file members to ASA officers, than Patrick P. Sim, M.L.S. From high school student to ASA President, all visitors received equal kindness and respect from Patrick Sim.

For the past four decades, nearly every international visitor to the WLM has emerged with tales from and about Patrick – and most of those stories are true. With his charm, intellect and knowledge, the Librarian Emeritus has changed the lives of hundreds of our colleagues around the world. He is irreplaceable, and sadly his true worth will probably only be recognized by many now that he is gone. A selfless, gentle soul, Patrick Sim has been uniquely honored by his election to honorary memberships in his three favorite organizations: the Anesthesia History Association (2003), the Academy of Anesthesiology (2010) and the ASA (2010).

For the final 25 years of his ASA service, Patrick amassed note cards in anticipation of finishing his masterwork on the antiquarian books that he loved so dearly, a tome that he hoped to title “Heritage of Anesthesia: An Annotated Bibliography of the Wood Library-Museum Rare Book Collection.” The WLM Publications Committee is feverishly working to collate, edit and publish Mr. Sim’s masterwork late in 2011. Those wishing to support this effort and to honor our fallen Librarian can do so online at www.wlmdonations.com or by phoning ASA Librarian Karen Bieterman at (847) 825-5586.

When he started the first of his 39 years working for the ASA, the self-deprecating Patrick Sim often joked that he could barely pronounce the word “anesthesia.” The physician-poet who popularized that word, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. also observed that “every calling is great when greatly pursued.” Clearly, Patrick Sim had such a great calling, and he pursued it to his utmost for the benefit of us all. We are all much poorer for his passing. Please pause for a moment and celebrate the life and legacy of Patrick P. Sim, M.L.S.