



William Ernest "Ernie" Rutherford, M.D. (June 12, 1939--July 28, 2012)

On July 28, 2012, the Grinnell College Class of 1961 unexpectedly lost a talented classmate and friend, Dr. William Ernest "Ernie" Rutherford. On a beautiful Saturday morning near his Monroe, Louisiana home, Ernie accidentally drowned.

Ernie made significant contributions to our undergraduate years, 1957-1961. He lived in Cowles Hall and served our junior year as its Vice President and the next year as its President and thus as an *ex officio* member of the Council of

House Presidents (C of HP). He also was on the staff for the 1960 *Cyclone* yearbook.

Ernie was a letterman in track and football and thus a member of Honor G.

On the track team he was a pole vaulter and javelin thrower. At the Midwest Conference meet in 1960, he tied for first in the vault and was third in the throw. His senior year, Ernie was the Captain of the team and finished first at the Conference meet in both of his events with a vault of 13 feet and a throw of 170 feet. In 1961 he was awarded the College's Harold Alexander Trophy for the Most Valuable member of the track team. (To the right is his photo with his pole and javelin from the 1961 *Cyclone*.)



A football game program from 1958 said he was a "5' 9," 155-lb. tailback [who was] inexperienced, but doing a fine job. A good passer, he will probably run the team next year." (To the left is his photo from that program.) The next two years, however, the team switched from a single-wing to a winged-T offense led by quarterbacks, Bob Woito '60 and Art Peterson '63. Nevertheless, Ernie earned letters for three years as a defensive back.

Ernie's involvement in football and student government his senior year merged in an interesting tale of Ernie's leadership.

Grinnell won its final football game in 1960, defeating Ripon, 23-0. After the team's return to campus that night, they had a festive beer blast on North Campus (Mac Field). As a result of the party's noise, some house presidents (and hence Ernie's fellow members of C of HP) went onto Mac Field and indiscriminately issued fines to members of the team.

Afterwards, Ernie was upset and led discussions at Cowles as to what should be done. As a result, Cowles (led by Ernie) seceded from student government and proclaimed that it would thereafter make and enforce its own rules, would no longer be part of student government and would not be subject to C of HP rules and dictates. (To the left is a photo of the leaders of the Cowles secession (from left to right): Ernie Rutherford and our classmates John Powers, Bill Kell, Jack Pitts and John Morris.)



The Cowles secession gathered much sympathy from other students and even from some faculty members (really something of a rebellion against *in loco parentis*). Students in other residence halls began to contemplate secession, and for a time it appeared that the whole fabric of student government might fall apart. Instead, in the Spring of 1961 a student constitutional convention was held that with subsequent student referendum approval totally reorganized student government.

The new constitution formed a new Student Government Association (SGA) with a Student Senate to make the rules for student conduct, the existing C of HP and AWS (Associated Women Students) Board to enforce the rules and new student courts to adjudicate violations of the rules. In the Spring of 1961, at the student government nominating convention, Rutherford gave the nominating speech for his fellow Cowles secessionist, Bill Halama, who went on to win the election and become the first SGA president in 1961-62.

Ernie's obtaining Grinnell's B.A. degree in Chemistry-Zoology in 1961 was an important step in his journey to fulfill his dream from age 4 of becoming a medical doctor. (His senior photo from the 1961 *Cyclone* is to the right.) His interest in the College was sparked by a visit to his high school in Albuquerque, New Mexico by a Grinnell admissions counselor who helped him obtain a scholarship that enabled Ernie to attend the College.



After graduating from Grinnell, Ernie took the next step in becoming a physician. He went directly to the University of Colorado School of Medicine, where he obtained his M.D. degree in 1965. For his last year of med school he was awarded a prestigious scholarship by the Boettcher Foundation. In 1964, during his junior year in medical school, he married Ileta Fay Atchley and began their life of 48 years together.

From 1965 through 1967 he was an Intern and Resident at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

Drafted in 1967, Ernie spent the next three years in Germany as an Air Force doctor while he and Ileta traveled throughout Europe and Scandinavia. He developed a love of skiing and became an honorary member of ski patrols in Germany and Czechoslovakia.

In 1970 he returned to Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis as a Research Fellow in Renal Disease where over the next eight years he did pioneering research on chronic kidney disease.

In August 1978 he and his family moved to Monroe, Louisiana. There he started a new life in the private practice of medicine to meet the medical needs of the large African-American population with high incidences of diabetes and kidney diseases. By 1982, he and Dr. Joan Blondin opened the first Northeast Louisiana Dialysis Center in Monroe, ultimately growing the practice to six clinics in the region. Dr. Rutherford was influential in establishing a rural health clinic in Start, Louisiana with Jennifer Bennett who worked with him since 1981.

In November 2006, Ernie started another new venture--university teaching. At Louisiana State University Conway he was a full professor of clinical family medicine, always teaching his residents to question everything, and to learn the "why" not just the "what," and always to listen to the patient (his mom always told him that). He received the teacher of the year award in 2010.

Ernie is survived by his wife Ileta, son Phillip Raymond Rutherford (Grinnell '88) and his wife Felicia Stingone and their two daughters Gabriella and Francesca, son Jason Stewart Rutherford '93 and his wife Jessica Rutherford and their two daughters Melanie and Nina, sister Margie Kimbrough, and a 'surrogate' son Joe Mansour. He is also survived by numerous sister- and brother-in-laws, nieces and nephews.

Gifts may be given to Grinnell College in memory of William "Ernie" Rutherford '61. Friends and family wish to establish a scholarship that will benefit Grinnell students interested in pursuing a degree in medicine. Those wishing to contribute may do so by sending a check to Grinnell College, Old Glove Factory, Attn: Meg Jones Bair, 733 Broad Street, Grinnell, IA 50112.

Walton, Funeral Services Set for Drowning Victim (July 30, 2012), http://myarklamiss.com/fulltext?nxd_id=154452 ; Brown, Update- Man Drowns in Bayou Desiard (July 30, 2012), http://myarklamiss.com/fulltext?nxd_id=154312; Obituary, William Ernest "Ernie" Rutherford, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thenewsstar/obituary.aspx?n=william-ernest-rutherford-ernie&pid=158868332&fhid=12536#fbLoggedOut>.