



## JOHN F. MACHEN, M.D. 1945-2001

The fall was always a special time on the Klamath River and Klamath River was a special place for John Machen. A memory: Fishing the River one September evening, I see John in his boat returning from up river, and he slows to spy what's happening. He hands me a beer. Bam!-fish on. My right hand hanging on to a fly rod bent to the handle, left hand holding on to a cold beer, foaming out the popped top, and in his boat grinning is one of the best friends I ever had.

I'll always be grateful to John for teaching me how to boat and fish the Klamath River. He taught me with such patience that I remember learning with out paying dues. John wasn't just a good fisherman; he was one of those rare fishermen who could revel in watching one of his friends play a fish. John was there for my first Steelhead on the Klamath. He also witnessed my hooking a Sucker fish on a fly, whence I proved Suckers can't jump. We laughed about that for days. Fishing with John always seemed to make the fish less important and the days more special. He felt getting people to respect fish was more important than hooking fish.

I remember stopping along the Klamath for a relief from the afternoon wind in John's boat. He stepped out on shore, lit up a cigar and casually cast out to an unlikely spot because that's why we were there wasn't it? John hooked into a bruiser. The fish realized it just before he did and the fish ran straight at him. As he started stumbling backward towards shore, the surprise of this unexpected fish propelled that cigar like a cruise missile from his mouth across the water. Whenever someone lights up a cigar that scene replays for me. Fishing with John often meant getting more excited about someone else's fish than he did. That may have been the lesson he taught me.

John was mechanically gifted, one of those invaluable individuals upon whom those of us who couldn't be trusted with a hammer or screwdriver depended. He knew a lot about engines, boats, planes and "guy" stuff. With his boys he built a custom boat and re-built two airplanes. He had faith in things mechanical. If equipment failed to function properly, it was probably due to operator error. All could be salvaged; all could be fixed.

A natural Urologist, John practiced in Eureka for more than twenty years. He often untangled many of our patients from some dire problem. For a Gynecologic Surgeon a Urologist is like a life guard. He was always available and had a reassuring calmness in his manner that seems typical of skilled surgeons. He offered help to his colleagues and offered hope to his patients. Along with his associates, he brought new and more efficacious treatment modalities to Humboldt County.

Growing up in Iowa, John's ethos was definitely Mid-Western, John Deere through and through. I think that accounted for his dry sense of humor, responsible also for his red hair and boyish grin. So many people living in California are from elsewhere. John valued family, friends and the

outdoors. Always grateful for small gifts, he accepted them with grace. John and I shared a similar hairline, so a hat was not just a personal statement, but rather a necessity in the outdoors.

I remember a hat I wore that John admired. The only one left in the store was an awful purple color, probably even too small for him. Yet he treasured that hat, knowing it was purchased with the currency of friendship.

John exalted in the successes his boys enjoyed, small or large, fishing or otherwise. He recognized and took pride in Matthew's musical prowess. So much so, that I remember at one point he said he was taking up the Sax himself. Scott was already finessing the trombone. For his sons, he was selfless. Teaching Scott to fly fish was high on his agenda. As time went by, John passionately tried to fill the inevitable gaps in his family life and marriage that a career in Medicine leaves behind, like potholes. Time spent with his wife and children became the measure of time's worth.

One dusky evening, John shared with me how he viewed the Klamath River as his sanctuary. He'd muse how the river was always changing yet always constant. Absent John, that river won't ever be the same for many of us. Fortunately, few of us will ever understand the onslaught of despair that swept him away, but there are many of us who would give a lot to fish just one more day with John Machen. Our prayers go with his family.

*By E. Lieberman, M.D.*