THIS MATERIAL WAS PREPARED FOR INSERTION IN A BOOK TO BE ISSUED ON VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH.

Oscar Sussman DVM, MPH, JD.
1969 GOLD HEADED CANE RECIPIENT

WHERE AND WHEN WERE YOU BORN? HOW WERE YOUR EARLY YEARS SPENT?

I WAS BORN IN N.Y.C. JULY 24, 1917. MY MOTHER WAS A HOMEMAKER. MY FATHER WAS AN ARTIST WHO COULD NOT SUPPORT OUR FAMILY FROM THE PROCEEDS OF HIS ART WORK. HE DECIDED TO OPEN HIS OWN SIGN PAINTING BUSINESS. HE WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL EXCEPT FOR FEW YEARS DURING THE DEPRESSION. I HELPED MY DAD TO ASSEMBLE PAINTING MATERIALS AND LEARNED FROM HIM.

WHAT FIRST MOTIVATED YOU INTO PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION FOR YOUR CAREER? WHAT FIRST MOTIVATED YOU INTO PUBLIC HEALTH?

It was in 1932 that I decided to become a Veterinarian. The decision was made when my dog was shot and killed in front of my home in New York. A well meaning neighbor and the policeman on the beat thought my dog was rabid. No examination, no waiting period, just a fast draw of the policeman's revolver and a shot in the head, that was it! I realized at that moment how much I loved animals. That was a turning point in my life. I wanted to become a veterinarian and get involved in public health.

WHAT DID YOU ENCOUNTER IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION THAT HELPED TO PREPARE YOU IN PUBLIC HEALTH, EPIDEMIOLOGY.

I did pre-vet at Iowa State, and then went on to Michigan State Veterinary College graduating in 1940. I was lucky and was given a part time position as a student assistant in Dr.Claude Bryan's microbiology section. The depression was still around, and I needed the funds! Dr. Bryan was working with Brucellosis. Dr.Bryan was the first professional who made me think about a career in public health. He used to take his students with him when he went out in the field to collect blood samples. One of my most memorable field trips was to Carl Sandburg's farm where his daughter and housekeeper were taking care of about 45 goats. They would call out the name of the goat, and it would jump up on the milking stand. It was sensational. We were invited to dinner by Mr.Sandburg. Dinner consisted of roast kid, goat milk, goat butter, goat cheese and goat custard dessert made by Sandburg's swedish housekeeper. For college students, living on about $3.50 a week during the depression, you can understand, besides having the opportunity to speak with Carl Sandburg, what it meant to us to have such an unusual dinner.

Dr.H.J.Stafseth was the other mentor that taught me bacteriology and immunology. He also was a great veterinarian and he aimed me toward public health.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST PHASE OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER?
Receiving my D.V.M. degree in June of 1940, I was sent to Puerto Rico by the USDA to test cattle for tuberculosis and brucellosis and in the process learned to speak Spanish fluently. While there, I began to understand something about Mosquitoes and various other vectors of tropical diseases first hand. I contracted Malaria and Dengue or Breakbone Fever, well named! It was my first real contact with epidemiology which eventually became my primary work.

DUTIES IN THE ARMED FORCES HAD A GREAT IMPACT ON MY CAREER!.
Shortly after the U.S. entered World War II, I enlisted in the army as a private and then applied for a commission. The Second Lieutenant who was in charge of our medical training unit came to me one day saluted and said, "First Lieutenant Sussman here are your orders." That was the first time I realized that being a Veterinarian gave one a preferred status in life.

My initial army assignment was a training unit for medical officers at Camp Blackstone, Virginia. It was made up mostly of physicians and dentists. I was a young, 25 year old healthy veterinarian. The rest of them were much older, sedentary, and getting larger girths than was good for them.

One day we were moved out with back packs including gas masks and told we were going to march to Camp Picket, about 20 miles from where we were at the time. That did not sound so bad, but about three miles on the way, they ran a vehicle by us and shouted "gas attack". They were pumping tear gas out. Donning our masks we were then double timed out of the area. We lost one physician and one dentist to heart attacks. This was a sobering incident.

Finishing that course I was sent to the Navy Yard at Brooklyn N.Y. where veterinarians were trained to inspect milk, cheese and other foods to protect our troops from food borne illnesses. Imagine my odyssey Iowa, Michigan, Puerto Rico and home to my original State and City of New York. I completed the course and was transferred to the First Air Force, at Mitchell Field, N.Y. and eventually to Dover Army Air Base in Delaware where I became a flying Veterinarian! We had guard dogs stationed up and down the coast at secret radar stations.

FLYING VERINARIANS AND INJURED GUARD DOGS.
Aside from my normal duties as base public health officer, I was called on to fly to the secret radar stations whenever the dogs needed medical attention. One of my duties other than the guard dog assignments was to supervise the purchase of the Army's seafood, particularly oysters and clams. The master sergeant assigned to work with me in that duty suggested we not take lunch just a large box of saltine and as you can expect we had a wonderful time testing the

shellfish. That was my initial epidemiolgical experience with seafood, None of my group got sick >a negative study! Of course in those times there were no fecal contaminations where we were purchasing the shellfish.

I was later transferred to Camp Springs Army Air Base then just a dusty little air field in Maryland outside of Washington, D.C., which trained P38 pilots. I remained there for about nine months doing public health work including food inspection and sanitation. I met my future wife Jane, an Ensign in the Navy, at an Officer's Club dance in Washington, D.C. We were married Nov. 11, 1944. By then I was transferred, to Godman Army Air Base, Fort Knox, Kentucky. After four months I was transferred again to Seymour, Indiana, for just five days and then was sent to the Sixth Army in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

PACIFIC THEATER OF OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II.
When I arrived in Manilla the war was still going on. Eight of us were sleeping in a large pyramidal tent. We were shelled on a rather continuous basis and learned to sleep through it. The morning of my fourth day I awoke and found that one of my tent mates was dead from shrapnel wounds - a very frightening experience!

Subsequently I was flown to Finchaven, New Guinea, to take over the 102nd Veterinary Unit. The Finchaven area had troops prepared to launch an invasion of Japan itself. There were many Japanese surrounding our peninsula. Every day we would have little skirmishes while performing our daily duties. Veterinarians were expected to carry weapons as the Geneva Convention did not apply to us. Fortunately I never had to use my pistol.

One day a Colonel complained that he would not allow his troops to use the flour issued because of bugs in it. He ordered the quartermaster to dump hundreds of pounds of weevily flour. The quartermaster knew we would have no bread and consulted me about the matter. Knowing that weevils did nothing more than add protein to the diet I wrote a relief letter to the quartermaster, told him to issue raisins to the bakers, suggesting we have raisin bread until the weevily flour was used up. From then on my unit could do no wrong, and we got whatever supplies we wanted from the depot.

The 102nd Veterinary unit after a few months in New Guinea received orders to embark for the Philippines. I received two sets of secret orders. One set ordered me to report to an Admiral on a move called "Olympic" and the other to a Major General on a move called "Comet". Understandably not knowing which was the more dangerous and not wishing to subject my men and myself to the most dangerous move, I was deliberating whom I should report to. Fortunately the War ended, and all orders were rescinded.

JAPAN AND INTERESTING OCCURRENCES.

I landed in Wakayama, Japan on September 24th, 1945. It turned out to be the same day my daughter, Nancy, was born. Our unit was on the beach, and there was a hill rising up ahead. We did not know what was going to happen for at the top there was a long line of Japanese coming down at us. We all got at the ready with our weapons poised. It turned out all they wanted to do was set up our tents and get some of our chocolates, salt etc. They also set up signs directing us to the Geisha district.

After several months of food inspection and epidemiology in Japan, I was rotated home as a Major in April of 1946. I reported to the USDA and was given the same grade and position I had held before the war. The veterinarians who stayed home as civilians with the USDA were up several grades. It seemed grossly unfair to us veterans on our return from war duty.

YALE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND MY M.P.H. DEGREE.

I had become intrigued with the public health work which I carried out in the army and not wanting to stay in cattle testing nor meat inspection, I applied for and was accepted at Yale University's School of Medicine. June of 1947 I received my Master of Public Health degree, joined the U.S.Public Health Service as a field epidemiologist in Arizona dealing with beef tapeworm, brucellosis and tuberculosis prevention in humans. I worked on "Q" fever and felt pretty good when my first article was published in Public Health Reports (1949) "Infection of the Brown Dog Tick, Rhipicephalus sanguineus, with Coxiella burnetti."

In 1949 I accepted a position with the N.J. State Department of Health as Public Health Veterinarian. I retired as Director of Consumer Health Services after serving the people of N.J. for 30 years.

From 1950 -1956 I attended Seton Hall University School of Law at night, finally receiving my J.D. degree in 1956. It was a bit difficult. Most of my studying was done on the train from Trenton to Newark and return. My law degree , however, was a big help in many of the problems I encountered in Public Health which had legal implications.

CAREER IN STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY.

An article written by Allan F. Yoder (October 9, 1975) for The (Bergen) Record of Northern New Jersey, sums up very well a portion of my career with the State of New Jersey, and my beginnings with the US Public Health Service in Arizona. Yoder said of me (reproduced with permission of The [Bergen] Record, Hackensack.)

"...In the State House, he is visible from a distance: a small bald man, round as a barrel, wearing knee socks,

bermuda shorts, and one of the 60 clip-on bow ties for which he is famous.

" He is a tight fist of a man, a civil servant perpetually outraged by the state government for which he works and ever willing to spill the beans about the excesses and shortcomings of that government.

" His name is Dr.Oscar Sussman, a veterinary doctor with a law degree from Seton Hall University... and the state's top health inspector. He is the man who spurred a revolution in sanitary standards when he brought the roaches and rat feces of a thousand New Jersey eating establishments onto the front pages by leaking a secret report on filthy restaurants to the press.

" And he ignited a mini-revoltuion within state government when he ignored the wishes of his superiors -including Governor William T. Cahill and Atty. Gen. George F.Kugler - and led his corps of inspectors into the kitchens of state prisons, mental health hospitals and nursing homes, ordering two closed until they were cleaned.

" Gov. Byrne is Sussman's latest target. The Governor raised Sussman's ire when an elite group of his friends formed themselves into the Woodrow Wilson society, charging annual dues of $500 apiece to raise money for Byrne's unofficial travel expenses. Harking back to his campaign against dirty kitchens, Sussman founded and then named himself president of Retch, Roach and Rat a Walking and Talking Together Society. He uses the society today to take potshots at Byrne and the rest of state government.

" The jibes at Byrne, however, are less pointed than in past campaigns. That may be that Sussman is toying with the idea of running for governor in 1977.

" Reaching across his cluttered desk Sussman proudly pulls a sample bumper sticker from an overflowing pile of papers. 'Give yourself an Oscar', the bumper sticker says, 'Elect Sussman Governor'.

" I'm not stupid." the 58-year-old Sussman says. I wouldn't run for governor just for the glory. But if there is a need for an independent candidate to raise the right issues in the governor's race - issues that consumers care about -then I'd run whether I had a viable chance or not. I would run to show the Republican and Democratic candidates that they make a mockery of the political process.'

" Sussman admits after a few hours conversation that he really doesn't think of himself as a politician. To be honest, he confides, 'I really don't want or expect to be

Governor... He says he would be content to spend a few more years as Director of Consumer Health Services.' ...

"Sussman's political plans have been fueled by an outpouring of support from fellow bureaucrats and friends who think he'd be a good governor. More than a few New Jersey newspaper editorialists have written about him as the brightest light in state government...

" I get letters from the aged people in nursing homes who think I'm a compassionate sort. A lot of people are encouraging me," Sussman says.

" I've been accused of being a headline hunter, and I am. But I don't do it for personal publicity --- just to get some attention paid to some of the things that I think are awful. .... I am aware that some people think I do things to be silly or to be mean or spiteful or to make a name for myself. But that's not true. I create controversy because I know that unless you create a focal point nobody pays any attention, I do what I do to point out the inequities.'

" Seeking out press support has been Sussman's modus operandi for thirty years. He tells a story of his first brush with controversy, when he was a young U.S.Public Health Service Officer working the cattle fields of the American Southwest shortly after World War II.

" The young veterinarian had been testing cattle for disease and he noted that large numbers of cows were infected with an organism that led to undulant fever in those who drank the cows' milk raw.' These cows,' Sussman says, his anger rising as he recalls the story, 'instead of being sent off to slaughter, the ranchers were selling them to poor Mexican-American families and hundred of kids got undulant fever'.

He says he couldn't get the Arizona government to halt the sale of infected cows until he turned his information over to a reporter for the Arizona Republic. "I'd gone through all the proper bureaucratic channels but nothing happened until I went to the papers." The same pattern has repeated itself during Sussman's years in N.J.

" The incident that brought Sussman fame, however, didn't unfold until a few years ago, when Sussman leaked a secret report to the newspapers showing that a huge number of New Jersey food establishments failed to meet the health code. The problem? An overdose of cockroaches, rats and mice droppings, layer upon layer of dried grease, improperly refrigerated food. "On and on until it's enough to make you retch." Sussman said.

" That wasn't the end of Sussman's battle with bugs. A few months after the campaign to clean up restaurant

kitchens' Sussman received an impassioned letter from a woman whose daughter was confined to the state psychiatric hospital in Trenton. It seems the woman had been feeding her daughter when a roach crawled off the food tray and onto her arm.

" Responding in his typical no-holds-barred fashion, Sussman ordered his health inspectors into the kitchens of hospitals and other state institutions. When they found the expected deplorable mess, Sussman ordered the kitchens closed at Trenton State Prison, and at the N.J. Home for Disabled Soldiers.

" When he recalls the incident he chortles. All hell broke loose'. His superiors in the Department of Health argued that no matter what the condition of the kitchens, the inmates and old people had to be fed.

" In no time at all, as Sussman continued his daily barrage against filth, his former boss, then Health Commissioner James Cowan, issued a memorandum forbidding any employee to speak to reporters without the commissioner's express written approval.

" He tried to gag me," Sussman says," but I went to court claiming abridgment of my First and 14th amendment rights."

" A three-judge federal court in Trenton ultimately ruled in Sussman's favor, and today he need's no one's permission to walk down the press corridor and harangue the reporters of his latest mission.

"This all sounds so corny," Sussman says, "but it really does bother me that the public thinks government is always working to protect the people, and its so often nothing more than a sham, a fraud."

So ends Yoder's article about me.

ALBERT EINSTEIN /PNEUMONITIS / AND HIS PARAKEET.

In another vein, working as an epidemiologist, one day, I was asked to look into the possibility that a parakeet owned by Dr. Albert Einstein might have Psittacosis. Einstein at the time had developed a pneumonia. The bird tested positive. Using a new antibiotic I had to inject the bird intramuscularly a number of times. After the first week Dr.Einstein offered me a glass of wine, cookies and the opportunity to answer some questions for him. He probed me for an hour. When I saw him 1Ø days later he told me more about the disease than I had told him. He was brilliant!

With regard to psittacosis in NJ in 1953 -1955 a number of establishments selling parakeets and other larger psittacine

birds were illegally importing infected birds and spreading the disease to other birds and to humans. There was a time when NJ quarantined a number of establishments until the birds could be checked out and treated.

My men and I were working night and day as well as weekends drawing blood from the birds and checking the blood to get psittacosis under control. Late one afternoon of a week when all three of our children were in bed with the flu, and I was working long hours on the psittacosis problem my wife, Jane, received a threatening telephone call from a man whose birds were under quarantine. He said to her," You tell your husband he better lift the quarantine on my birds or something just may happen to you." Those were dark days for both of us.

BATS AND RABIES IN NEW JERSEY.
While in N.J. my field research resulted in finding that Bats were infected with Rabies, a new finding in that area. For a time New Jersey had been free of Rabies. I also did a considerable amount of field research with Richard E. Shope M.D. of the Rockefeller Institute. My family became quite accustomed to the birds, worms and other animals I kept in our refrigerator until I turned them over to Dr. Shope. Dr. Shope was later given an honorary Degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine for his work helping animals as well as humans.

SLEEPING SICKNESS IN NEW JERSEY.
New Jersey, unfortunately, between 1959 and 1961 became well known for Eastern Equine Encephalitis in humans living or vacationing on the South Jersey Shore. It resulted in a public health and economic problem as people started avoiding the South Jersey Shore which depended a great deal on the tourist trade.

The veterinary unit I was in charge of tackled finding out the disease transmission. Dr.Ray Kerlin, Dr. William Carter, Dr. Robert Goldsboro and I learned how to mist net passerine birds, identify them, draw blood, and band these tiny creatures. We recaptured them for the five years that our study went on. These blood samples were checked for antibody levels so we could assess when they had become infected. We also checked humans, horses and other animals during that time to try to find out which ones could have a high enough level of virus to pass on to others via vectors. This involved working with entomologists, such as Walter Gusciora in our unit, who caught mosquitoes and determined the presence of virus and the animal or avian blood meals they had eaten prior to capture.

RATS, HOGS, GARBAGE OUTSIDE N.Y.C.
New Jersey's Secaucus area was well known for the feeding of raw garbage from N.Y.C. to hogs. Secaucus was also well known for the odors and the diseases the hogs became infected with

especially vesicular exanthema, cholera and trichinosis because of the raw pork found in the garbage. Some people thought that hogs never ate rats. That was not true. Rats were abundant in the feeding areas. I saw hogs stomping on them when they fought to get at the food. In some instances the farmers would hold the hogs back until the black carpet of rats had come in to get their share. Once the hogs were allowed in, the rats would be squashed under foot. Hogs would avoid the skins with fur but eat the entrails with relish. There came a time when it was necessary for the State of New Jersey to require the garbage to be cooked before feeding it to the hogs. Eventually the hog farms of Secaucus were removed to rural South Jersey. This made traveling the N.J. Turnpike to and from New York City a pleasanter experience.

VIVESECTION AND HUMANE SOCIETIES.

While in the State Department of Health I was in constant discussion with humane societies regarding the use of animals for research. I debated Cleveland Amory on T.V. about the subject and pointed out to him that a good deal of the scientific studies aided the animal population as well as humans. Remarks from the public afterward indicated I won.

VETERINARY TRAINING AND TEACHING

My veterinary training enabled me to use my skills to teach in a number of universities. When I retired from the N.J. Department of Health I was offered a position as Visiting Professor at Colorado State University. I stayed there for two years and then accepted a position as Florida's Associate State Epidemiologist where I remained for three years. My veterinary training enabled me then to accept a position teaching biology at the Tallahassee Community College and Alamance Community College in N.C. when eventually Jane and I moved to Carol Woods a retirement community in N.C.

FULBRIGHT PROFESSORSHIP AS A VETERINARIAN.

In 1962 the U.S.State Department invited me to accept a Fulbright Professorship with an assignment at the "High Institute of Public Health", Alexandria, Egypt, U.A.R. I was to help in an evaluation of the epidemiologic and preventive activities of their health services. I was given permission by then Governor of N.J., Robert Meyner, for a leave of absence to accept. My wife and our three children joined me. Egypt was a memorable experience for all of us. My work was interesting and productive. It amazed me that there was a Kosher slaughter house still active in Alexandria and took my students there on a field trip. There was also a very busy pork store in Alexandria even though the Moslem population did not eat pork,

CONSULTANT TO WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION.
In 1966 I served as a consultant to the World Health Organization in Brazil. I taught epidemiology and public health at the Veterinary School in Belo Horizonte. Jane and I were surprised that most of the people we met in Egypt also spoke English. In Brazil few people spoke anything but Portuguese, and my knowledge of Spanish did not help me a bit.

VETERINARIAN WAS THE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER OF PANAMA CANAL.
While returning from Brazil we decided to travel to the Panama Canal Zone. Robert Matheny DVM, the Canal Public Health Officer, arranged for us to stay at the Tivoli Guest House. It was like going back 50 years in time to see this wonderful place which had been built in Teddy Roosvelt's days. The whole area was beautiful. As we enjoyed the pleasure of seeing the locks in operation, it was easy to see, however, the difficulties which had to be overcome to build the canal. DR. MATHENY THE VETERINARIAN IN CHARGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE CANAL ZONE DID A REMARKABLE JOB .

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND INDIA.
In 1974 I served WHO once again. This time I was sent to Calcutta, India. I was, of course, quite pleased that my veterinary degree had been instrumental in my follow up work in public health, food inspection and epidemiology.

MY CHILDREN CHICKEN AND POTATO SALADS AND MY WIFE.
Just prior to my retirement from the State of New Jersey a reporter from the Newark Star Ledger called, and my wife answered the phone. She stated to him that he probably wanted to speak to me. He said, "No, I want to ask you how your husband's work has affected your children." She laughed heartily and answered that they did not eat egg salad, chicken salad, tuna salad nor potato salad when they went out to eat since they had heard me, any number of times, on the phone explaining to people in charge of church suppers and picnics how bacteria grew in salads when not properly refrigerated or put into containers too large for the contents to become cold through and through and how this had made the people at their picnics or suppers very sick.

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE CONSUMER.
My veterinary public health unit grew to become the Consumer Health Services Unit of the Department with about 150 persons reporting to it.

ORGANIZATIONS WHICH HAVE HONORED ME.
I have been a Fellow of the American Public Health Association (1949); vice-president of the AVMA (1956); a delegate to the House of Representatives from New Jersey (1952-1959); President of the New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association(1958); President of the Conference of Public Health Veterinarians (1956); President of the New Jersey Public Health Association (1969); Recipient of the Karl F. Meyer Gold Headed Cane Award (1969); President of the Professional Health Officers Society of New Jersey (1981); Member of the Florida Bar (1988) and Diplomate of the American College of Epidemiology.

TUB THUMPING AND BIG JIM
As I reflect further there was a situation in the Public Health Service called "Tub Thumping" by a person called "Big Jim", James H. Steele DVM.(admiral) (Tub thumping meaning to promote Veterinary Public Health) and he surely could thump. I thank him for his confidence in me though he criticized me from time to time about wearing a frayed bow tie.

MY FAMILY
I am happy to say that my three children have somewhat followed in my footsteps. My oldest daughter, Nancy Siverd, has had an impressive career with Lederle Laborities and its successor Wyeth-Ayerst research where she is Associate Director of Pre-clinical Trial Documentation. My younger daughter, Margaret Poppe, is Assistant Director of Public Health Nursing for the State of Vermont. My son, Timothy, a Disabled Navy Veteran trained in Disaster Relief and who now works as a volunteer in disaster services at the American Red Cross in Chapel Hill. I currently reside at Carol Woods, Chapel Hill, N.C. with my wife, Jane, of fifty-six years. Jane has never ceased to be amused when she met colleagues of mine for the first time, they invariably ask,
"How do you live with that guy."

JANE BECAME AN ACCOMPLISHED AND RECOGNIZED ARTIST IN WATER COLOR, SILVER CRAFTSMANSHIP AND IN PARTICULAR WOOD WORKING. JANE DIED DECEMBER 25, 2001.

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