

## “How Penn Molded Me”

*A memoir by Perry Clark, C'68*

Penn has been central to my life. In high school, I set my sights on being accepted. Arriving on campus, I set about meeting Penn's expectations of excellence. I worked hard at it --- very hard. I did not realize upon graduating how well prepared I was to meet the challenges I would face. That realization came later.



When I left Penn, I thought I would never return. I was grateful for the opportunities given me and made donations from time to time, but Penn was part of my past, not part of my life. That changed in 2008 when during the Making History campaign, a gift officer from the College visited me in Portland, Maine, where I live. She asked me if I had ever returned to the campus; I allowed as how I was not too interested in doing so. Nevertheless, she persisted. She told me that if I gave her a list of people I would like to meet on campus, she would arrange the meetings. I thought she was bluffing; to get rid of her, I gave her a list. She arranged the meetings. The game was up; I returned to campus.

Because my sister had died from early-onset Alzheimer's disease in 2000, I wanted to meet with somebody from Penn's Center for Neurodegenerative Disease Research. I thought I would be meeting with just somebody. My wife and I ended up meeting with John Q. Trojanowski, MD, Ph.D., Director of Penn's Institute on Aging and Virginia M-Y. Lee, Director of the Center. They are world-class scientists who have been in the forefront of unraveling the mysteries of diseases like Alzheimer's for 26 years. And they were taking time to meet with us. I was impressed.

Drs. Lee and Trojanowski are not only brilliant scientist-scholars, but they also have a gift for describing their work in clear, compelling terms. As our meeting ended, I resolved to find ways to support their efforts. One thing led to another. I made some donations. I traveled to Philadelphia for some Institute on Aging Visiting Scholars presentations. Because of my obvious interest, I was asked to become a member of the Institute's External Advisory Board and I am now serving as Chair.

Looking back over the fifty years since graduation, I now realize how Penn molded me. Penn's high expectations drove me to strive for the best in myself, a striving that became a habit. And I gained the discipline necessary for learning to learn, a vital skill in a rapidly changing society. Finally, following Ben Franklin's principle that true learning should bring a desire to make a positive difference in the world, I endeavor to use my knowledge and skills to help make my world a little better.

From not wanting to come back to Penn, I have reached the point of visiting at least every six months. After our visit in 2008, my wife's first, I asked my her what she thought of Penn. "I love it," she said, "It's where the action is." She's right. We'll keep coming back.



*Above is a picture that was taken when Senator Collins visited the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease Research at Penn. Senator Collins is the Chair of the Senate Committee on Aging and she visited the CNDR at my invitation. From left to right in that picture: my wife Elaine Clark, me, Virginia Lee, PhD, MBA (Director of the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease Research), Senator Collins, and John Trojanowski, MD, Ph.d, RES'80 (Director of Penn's Institute on Aging)*