

John Rogers Blinks



John Rogers Blinks
March 21, 1931 ~ May 29, 2012

PEBBLE BEACH - John Rogers Blinks, of Pebble Beach and Friday Harbor, WA, succumbed to Parkinson's disease on Tuesday evening at the age of 81. He was born March 21, 1931, in New York City. Dr. Blinks was Chairman of the Department of Pharmacology at the Mayo Foundation from 1968 to 1988 and a Professor of Pharmacology at the Mayo Medical School from 1973 to 1990. In 1990, he retired to Friday Harbor, but continued to pursue his research as Professor of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Washington's Friday Harbor Labs until 2002.

Dr. Blinks graduated from Carmel High School in 1948, received his BA in Biology from Stanford University in 1951 (elected to Phi Beta Kappa), and graduated cum laude from Harvard Medical School in 1955. After completing his internship at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in 1956, and his military service as a Senior Assistant Surgeon in the U.S. Public Health Service in 1958, he began his distinguished career in pharmacological research and teaching at the Harvard Medical School. From 1962 to 1963 he took a leave of absence from Harvard to do research with Professors Huxley and Wilkie at University College in London, then continued at Harvard until he was recruited by the Mayo Clinic to start its Pharmacology Department in 1968. His awards include the Award of Merit from the American Heart Association in 1981; the Mayo Foundation Distinguished Investigator in 1985; the Otto Kraymer Award from the American Society for Pharmacology in 1987; the MERIT Award from the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute in 1988; the Research Achievement Award from the American Heart Association in 1989; and the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Mayo Foundation in 1997.

Dr. Blinks' career in research was focused on understanding how calcium ions that are present in intracellular fluid control contractions in heart muscle. He and his team pioneered the use of aequorin, a protein that emits light in the presence of calcium ions, to gain a better understanding of calcium transport and its role in control of the muscle.

Dr. Blinks' long association with the Friday Harbor Labs, and his love for San Juan Island, began in 1966 when he travelled to the area to collect material for his research (aequorin is found in a species of jellyfish abundant in the waters of Puget Sound). This was the first of many Blinks family expeditions to Friday Harbor, and led ultimately to their move to the island in 1990.

Dr. Blinks is the son of long-time Carmel residents Lawrence Rogers Blinks (1900-1989), Professor of Biology at Stanford and Director of Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove from 1943 to 1965, and Anne Hof Blinks (1903-1995) well known to many in the community for her research and replication of historic and prehistoric textiles, her skill at spinning and weaving, and her never ending quest to breed the perfect color of black sheep.

Dr. Blinks met his wife, Doris Chambers Blinks, while she was studying for a Masters Degree in Marine Biology with his father. They were married in 1953 and are survived by three children, Susan Mayo Blinks of San Diego (an equestrian who frequently represents the United States in International Dressage competitions, and member of Bronze Medal winning Dressage Team at the Sydney Olympic Games), Sarah Blinks Shapiro and her husband, James Shapiro of San Francisco, and Elizabeth Rogers Blinks of Seattle; as well as four grandchildren, Samuel, Anne, Benjamin and Elizabeth Shapiro.

Dr. Blinks was widowed in 2003. Soon after, he had the good fortune to re-connect with his long time friend and Carmel High School classmate, Francis Gillmore Maroun. They were married in 2006 and enjoyed a few years of adventure, including trips to Sicily, Norway and the Galapagos Islands, before Parkinson's disease began to restrict his activities. Francis Blinks has been his enduring source of support in these last years.

A service will be held at the Church in the Forest, 3152 Forest Lake Road, Pebble Beach, CA at 3:30pm on Saturday, June 2, 2012. The family suggests that memorial contributions may be sent to your favorite charity, or to the: Anne Hof Blinks Fellowship in Marine Biology, c/o Rachel Anderson, UW-Friday Harbor Labs, 620 University Rd., Friday Harbor, WA 98250 (the check should reference Anne or John Blinks).

Published in The Monterey Herald on June 1, 2012