

Jack Haas

Gordon College professor, research physical chemist, historian of science, father of John, Ruth and Mark, husband of Ann, church elder, organist, pianist, Boys Brigade leader, ASA web site administrator, author of our church history, ASA journal editor, good friend, and most important of all, a follower of Jesus Christ. I'm sure I have left out some facets of Jack's life, but even this list demonstrates a life lived to the hilt in service to the kingdom of God. Ann (his wife) asked me to give a eulogy, and how could I say no? He lived to within a week of his 90th birthday – a long and distinguished life. He didn't want people to say good things about him when he passed, but we can't help it and he can't either, now. Jack never wanted to draw attention to himself, his abilities, his accomplishments. He just wanted to serve, help, teach, and keep busy.

Jack was the kind of friend who would drop everything if you needed help. That happened to me one day. I was doing something with my TV antenna, and had to get up on my roof. My ladder, fully extended, just made it to the rooftop when it stood on a small side porch. I climbed up and scrambled on to the roof, fixed the antenna, and then started thinking about getting down. I couldn't even see the top of the ladder from the roof, and just froze. I finally yelled down to Ann, "I can't get down." I had visions of calling the fire company to come, and then I thought: Jack Haas will know what to do. "Call Jack," I said. Ann called and he came over immediately. He put a large wooden box that was on the porch, under the ladder, which extended the rungs well above the level of the roof. That was enough for me to be able to ease my way over the edge backwards and climb down. Jack had his own issues with ladders later in life when he climbed up on his solarium roof to clean it and slipped off, but that's another story.

Jack taught chemistry at Gordon for 34 years, coming to Gordon from Grove City College in order to start a chemistry department. He was chairman of the science division at Gordon for many years, earning the respect of his colleagues with his wise leadership. At one point, the concept of "servant leaders" was our faculty rallying call. We had a small faculty lounge in MacDonald Hall for the science division, and the coffee scene was, frankly, a mess most of the time, until our secretary cleaned it up. Jack (I'm sure it was him) finally put up a large sign over the sink: "Servant leaders clean up their own messes." That was Jack's way – he was never confrontational, but he got things done.

One of his more interesting exploits happened when it came time to get rid of many of the chemicals that were in a stockroom behind Emery Hall. Most of them were handled by an environmental disposal firm, but there were several bottles of elemental sodium and potassium that got special treatment. These are two metallic elements that are never found in pure form in nature. They're highly reactive, but they can be stored in oil. If either element is exposed to water, hydrogen gas and a lot of heat is given off, very

explosively, and the sodium and potassium form hydroxides which then dissolve in water. Somehow, these elemental metals were released from their oil in the small wetland behind Emery science building, resulting in some spectacular explosions and small fires. No one seemed to know how the fires started when the fire trucks came to put them out.

I never sat in a classroom of Jack's, but his reputation was well-known. One former student said: "Happy Jack! I still don't understand how one can have so much fun, and so consistently, in a chemistry lab. It must be the great sense of humor and the kind, loving heart. I'll take more of that any day." Jack often used cartoons from the strip B.C. to liven up his classes.

Jack could play the piano like no one else. Not classical, but hymns. Our church - First Presbyterian – used to have a Sunday evening service, and Jack was always at the piano. He didn't need a hymn book – he knew all the hymns by heart, and played them with such skill that you wanted to just listen to the music and forget about singing the words. For many years Jack and Ann helped with services on Sunday afternoons at the Seaview Nursing Home in Rowley, with Jack always there to play the piano. The residents there, I'm sure, had little idea how blessed they were to have Jack play for them.

Jack loved the American Scientific Affiliation and what it stood for as a forum for Christians to examine issues that connected faith and science. Randy Isaac spoke (will speak) of his work with the ASA. While he was ASA President, in 1977, Jack and I cooperated in publishing an interview in Christianity Today titled What Christian Colleges Teach about Creation. We were always of one mind in the debates over creation and evolution – both of us coming at the issues from mainstream science and our orthodox Christian beliefs. Jack was a gifted writer and thinker, and his interests expanded in later years to the history and philosophy of science, often connecting to works done by scientists from abroad. He wrote constantly – most recently, until just a few months ago, in fact, on a history of Frederick Prince, the man who built the estate (Princemere) that is now occupied by Gordon College.

Toward the end of his life, Jack lost a significant part of his eyesight, and that bothered him more than he would say. Yet, his eyes were always fixed on Jesus, and now he sees clearly the one whose Kingdom Jack served faithfully and with great humility throughout his life.

Dick Wright