MEMORIAL TO JOHN F. SEBASTIAN

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

John Sebastian came to Miami in August 1967 after completing his Ph.D. in organic chemistry at the University of California Riverside and an NIH postdoctoral fellowship in enzymology at Northwestern University. At Northwestern, he met Sandra and married her in East Sussex UK before joining the Miami faculty. John was a member of a cadre of young people hired into the Department of Chemistry to enhance teaching and research in the department in the late 1960s.

John was a gracious, principled man who developed excellent relationships with his colleagues. He was particularly pleased to develop a productive collaboration with John (Jay) Grunwell, who joined the Department shortly after John. Together they published several papers on molecular orbital (MO) calculations. When personal computers became available, John recognized the potential power of a desktop computer for his research, and he was one of the first faculty members to buy one. John installed MO programs and used them not only in his research, but with Jay Grunwell developed a simple Huckel MO program to introduce chemistry majors to computers and to molecular orbital calculations in their sophomore year.

John had diverse research interests and published papers on organo-lithium chemistry, cyclic vinyl ethers, and catalysis by the enzyme carboxypeptidase A. He and fellow biochemist Charley Griffin programed their early Apple computers to perform enzyme kinetic analyses. In one of John's last publications he used molecular orbital theory to explore the substrate binding site of carboxypeptidase A, work that foreshadowed the development of computational biochemistry. Today, computational biochemistry is at the heart of medical diagnostics and drug development in all academic and industrial research programs.

Soon after John arrived at Miami, he and several colleagues started to meet on Saturday mornings to create the BS Chemistry major, a curriculum which has served our students well for 50 years. John and Jay Grunwell worked out the organic chemistry courses. John and Charley Griffin designed the new biochemistry courses. Years later, John was an important participant in development of the BS and BA Biochemistry degrees. John taught both organic chemistry and biochemistry at the graduate and undergraduate level. He always argued for the highest level of courses and for hands-on student learning. For example, John worked with Jay Grunwell to introduce Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) Spectroscopy into the curriculum at the undergraduate and graduate level. John oversaw the NMR spectrometer and ensured it could be used by students at all levels.

John was highly ethical and intellectually honest. He was unassuming and humble, putting colleagues and students first. For example, as the expert on NMR instrumentation in the Department, John ran low temperature spectra of dimethyl sulfur diimide prepared by a student from a colleague's lab. The study revealed the dynamic structure of the compound and yielded a

publication. John refused to be an author because he said he was merely a technician in that project.

John was a consummate Department citizen, serving on many Departmental Committees and on University Senate. He was very compassionate in dealing with students and was a member of many doctoral student committees. He never failed to make cogent suggestions to improve the dissertation.

On a personal level, John was very knowledgeable about California wines. He loved to remind people who loved French wines that the European vines, which had been blighted, were actually all grafts on blight-resistant California roots. He also liked to point out to us parochial easterners that Chicago was only one third of the way across the country east to west. After over 40 years of teaching and research, John and Sandra retired to his native California to enjoy wines and pursue their mutual enjoyment of literature, cinema, art and music. They were also able to enjoy the company of their two sons and families, including their three grandchildren. John passed away October 15 2026 at the age of 86.

John's family is establishing a memorial fund in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. Donations can be sent to the Miami University Foundation, c/o the John Sebastian Memorial Fund, 725 E. Chestnut Street, Oxford OH 45056.

John led a productive and fruitful life which we choose to celebate.

Respectfully submitted,

John R. Grunwell

Ann E. Hagerman