

Foreword

This tribute to John Tukey was the idea of Howard Wainer, who conceived of it and oversaw the initial editorial phase. As you will see, what resulted was not only a celebration of the life and work of a great statistician, but also a personal journey of remembrances.

All of the contributors were students of Tukey. Some received their Ph.D. from him, some wrote with him and all learned from him. We have tried to show all sides of the man—statistician, scientist, teacher—and to also look into some personal history (the anecdotes seem endless!).

In addition to the articles that Wainer describes, we have included three contributions on the teaching of Tukey, describing, in particular, the legendary Statistics 411. It is indeed a lesson for us all that a man whose quantity of research and writings could fill a room, with quality beyond outstanding, not only never forgot the students, but also took special care to be a good teacher.

The tribute also contains a reprint of an interview with John and Elizabeth Tukey, conducted by Luisa Fernholz and Stephan Morgenthaler, and first appearing in Brillinger, Fernholz and Morgenthaler (1997). Two other interviews with Tukey have appeared in *Statistical Science*. F. J. Anscombe (1988) interviewed both Tukey and Frederick Mosteller, and Fernholz and Morgenthaler (2000) interviewed both John and Elizabeth Tukey. However, the interview that we are now reprinting is different from both of these; it gives us more insight into the life and times of Tukey and also contains some interesting observations about teaching. I thank Princeton University Press for permission to reprint the interview.

The December 2002 issue of *The Annals of Statistics* contains seven memorial articles about John Tukey: a biography and six in-depth looks at different facets of his work. In assembling this tribute, we have tried to complement the *Annals* articles and, for the student unfamiliar with Tukey and his work, to provide an introduction to those articles.

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After seeing all that Tukey did, the word “visionary” comes to mind. Although I’m not sure this is the appropriate term for anyone, I am sure that the philosophy, teaching and statistical work of John Tukey prepared us for the 21st century. Tukey always focused on the data—not just to perform an analysis, but to learn at all levels—applications, theory, methods and philosophy. And he never wavered in his focus. Even when the statistical world was much more rooted in mathematical theory (sometimes forgetting the data), Tukey was focused on the data (never forgetting the mathematical theory). Statistics is clearly moving in this direction, learning from the data flood and continually constructing new theory and methods to deal with it.

I never knew John Tukey personally, and I am poorer for that. I do have my personal anecdote, however. In 1977, my first year as an assistant professor at Rutgers University, there was an applied statistics conference at Princeton (just down the road). I attended, and was listening to a talk by a very famous statistician (whose name escapes me), when a devastating question came from a person standing at the back of the room. I had previously noticed this person, but based on his very casual, grayish attire, I thought he was the janitor. At that point I knew my career was finished, because if the janitors at Princeton knew so much more statistics than I did, what could I expect to accomplish?

Of course, I soon learned that it was John Tukey who asked the question, but only when I read Frank R. Anscombe’s article, and learned about the 40-year-old polo shirts, did everything become clear. [Karen Kafader pointed out to me that Lyle Jones tells a similar story in his introduction to Tukey’s collected works (Tukey, 1986). At a December 1952 ASA meeting in Chicago, there was a person standing at the back reading a newspaper, “seeming to pay no attention to the speaker.” Professor Jones assumed that “he was a citizen of Chicago who had come in from the cold,” until the end of the presentation, when the citizen delivered a “penetrating critique” of the presentation.]

John Tukey was a rare individual, indeed, and brought to his students and colleagues not only his love for statistics and good science, but also his love for them.

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