

PORTRAIT

Dr. John J. Bonica
1917-1994.
Founder of IASP



John Bonica was born on the small island of Filicudi, near Sicily. His family emigrated to the United States when he was eleven. Life was not easy for a boy whose father died 4 years later. John became the principal wage earner for his family at a young age; he sold newspapers and produce and did odd jobs. In high school he took up wrestling; when he graduated, he turned professional in college and then medical school. John graduated from Marquette University School of Medicine in 1942 and shortly thereafter married Emma Baldetti. This was a wonderful marriage that produced three daughters and one son: John was devoted to all of them.

John entered the United States Army in 1944. He was sent to Madigan Army Hospital in Fort Lewis, Washington, and promptly became Chief of Anesthesiology. He supplemented his income by wrestling. He taught himself regional anesthesiologic techniques, provided surgical anesthesia, taught junior physicians, and became appalled at the pain and suffering endured by soldiers who had been wounded in war. When his wife had a life-threatening experience with open drop anesthesia for the birth of their first child, John developed a new mission - the introduction of regional anesthetic techniques for obstetrical anesthesia. Emma was one of the first women to have epidural anesthesia for the birth of their second child.

In 1947, John left the Army and became Chief of Anesthesia at nearby Tacoma General Hospital. He organized a group of physicians who met regularly to talk about shared patients with chronic pain. He authored *The Management of Pain*, published in 1953. This was the first comprehensive textbook on pain treatment in any language. In 1960, John became the Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Washington in Seattle. He held this post until 1978 but as Professor Emeritus continued to work just as hard until his retirement from the faculty in 1992. John found the time to continue his clinical research activities, authored numerous books and monographs, hundreds of scientific papers, delivered thousands of lectures throughout the world; one of the first things John did at the University of Washington, was to found a multidisciplinary pain clinic. This was the first formalized training program in pain management. The University established the Multidisciplinary Pain Center in 1978, recognizing John's accomplishments and wishing to provide a broad base for its support beyond a single department. He stepped down as Director of the Pain Center in 1983.

John made his biggest move - the establishment of an international organization devoted to pain research and treatment in 1973, the International Association for the Study of Pain, the journal *PAIN* and the national chapters throughout the world.

John was the recipient of numerous awards, citations and honors, both national and professional. What many do not know is that John suffered terribly from his own chronic pains. Too many years of wrestling led to arthritic changes in his spine and major joints; he had four spine operations and countless hip and shoulder procedures. He probably had more nerve blocks and trigger-point injections than anyone else on the planet.

John and Emma may be gone, but the force and the memories of this magnificent couple remain amongst us.