Ari van Tienhoven

April 22, 1922 – January 31, 2014

Professor Ari van Tienhoven was born in The Hague, Netherlands. During his college years, which coincided with World War II, he was part of the student resistance movement in the Netherlands. This ultimately led to him being hidden in the home of a Frisian farmer. He developed enormous gratitude and love for this family for the sacrifice and risk they took on his behalf. True to Ari’s loyal nature, he maintained a lifelong friendship with them and their extended family.

While a student in Wageningen, his knowledge of Dutch, German, French and English enabled him to volunteer as a guide for visitors. As a result, he was invited to visit the University of Illinois and eventually, he left the Netherlands and came to the United States in 1947 to begin a graduate program at the University of Illinois. His beloved Ans joined him in Illinois sometime after and they were married in March, 1950. Under the guidance of Dr. Andrew Nalbandov, he began his research career focusing on poultry physiology and completed his Ph.D. in 1953. He spent two years as an Assistant Professor at Mississippi State College and then joined
the faculty in the Department of Poultry Science at Cornell in 1955. He enjoyed teaching and was well liked by students.

“Dr. van” (as his students called him) believed that his most important contribution was through his teaching. For many years he taught Reproductive Physiology of Vertebrates. He stated that “teaching was the real joy of my professional life….some of the reasons for this love are that I have an evangelistic (but agnostic!) tendency but also that I love the subject matter, which is easy because it deals with sex!” He also taught courses in avian physiology and animal reproduction. His teaching was recognized with the Edgerton Career Teaching Award (selected by his peers) as well as the Professor of Merit Award (selected by students).

Dr. van incorporated unconventional teaching methods and evaluation strategies before it was fashionable. While his oral exams struck terror in many students, he believed it was a useful technique for evaluating students. He was the quintessential professor—always asking questions and setting high standards for class work and research. He was outspoken on matters of student concern and many students came to him for advice. He was never too busy to help students and colleagues solve their problems. When faculty members rejoiced in the quiet of summer in Ithaca, they were quickly reminded by Ari that the students made it all possible. He retired promptly at the age of 65 but retirement really only meant that he was no longer on the payroll. After retirement, he initiated 2 new courses; he developed a very timely course on AIDS and Society and subsequently, an additional course on Ethics and Animal Science, which continues to the present.

Ari generally had a hands-off approach to graduate student training. His graduate students had enormous freedom. He always challenged them although his basic requirement was to work hard and not manipulate data. As long as this was done, one had his complete support and loyalty.

Ari was very good at designing physiological experiments that could confirm or deny proposed mechanisms for reproductive phenomena. He helped explore the possible reasons for why birds are the only
vertebrate group that does not have any live-bearing species. He also published on several areas in poultry physiology including ovulation, thermoregulation and animal welfare. He published the first stereotaxic atlas of the brain of a bird and his studies of the thyroid effect on reproduction were landmarks in the field. He was made a Fellow in the Poultry Science Association as well as a Fellow in American Association for the Advancement of Science. His desire to learn as much as possible about chicken physiology and anatomy found him attending a wide range of talks on campus. Part of one sabbatical leave was spent as a visiting professor in the Department of Anatomy at the Veterinary College where he was able to increase the teaching time devoted to bird anatomy. His ability to read the literature in several languages was a great help to many colleagues and led to his being chosen by Professor Asdell to revise his book on mammalian reproduction. In addition to this book, he also published two editions of a reproductive physiology textbook.

At Cornell, he thought of himself as a very good “politician” in that he was often successful in getting things done. He loved the freedom at Cornell and the history of cross-college interactions. He believed that anything was possible at Cornell and often commented that when he asked a colleague for help, he always received it. His loyalty to people and causes he supported was unwavering. He was a man of principle in all of his dealings and made his intentions clear. He was well known and appreciated for the many tough years that he served on the Ithaca School Board. At the conclusion of his term as President, the School Board praised Ari’s “complete, eminently fair treatment of all issues to come before this Board.” In 2001, Ari received the Tompkins Community Action award to acknowledge his contributions “given unselfishly over the past 35 years.”

In his last lecture, Ari defined himself as somewhat of an “idealistic pragmatist, not a philosopher or a contemplator, but a politician in the best sense of the word, who defines politics as the art of the possible.” Ari made many things possible. His many anonymous gifts—to the parent struggling to pay a school fee or the custodian determined to complete a degree—were spontaneous and had a
direct impact on the recipient. Often his donations honored others, including former students, public figures, mentors, and colleagues. Ari established awards and endowments in Mann Library to honor his wife, individual staff members, and student and staff employees of the library.

Soon after Ari officially retired in 1987, he remarked to a friend, “Cornell can do quite well without me, but I really cannot do without Cornell.” Ari never left Cornell. In addition to his office in Morrison Hall, he established himself in Mann Library, a place he considered his home away from home. Every morning in the Library, he read his daily Dutch newspapers online, scanned a broad range of science journals on the shelves, and sent copies of articles to friends or colleagues that he thought would interest them. Ari wrote that “Cornell has been unbelievably good to me and the words Freedom with Responsibility have not been a slogan but have been and are a credo.”

In the final lecture of his Reproductive Physiology class, *Human Reproduction and Society: a two way street. A Sermon,* Ari spoke as both an animal physiologist and a citizen. He considered the relationship between human reproduction and society. Ari was struck by the unique qualities of the Declaration of Independence, noting that he knew of “no Declaration or Constitution that includes such a statement about the right to the pursuit of happiness.” He challenged his students to be thoughtful citizens:

“My career and much of my life is nearly over and it is to you, ‘my’ students that I have to look at the future which I may partly see and partly have to take on trust. I hope that my course and this sermon have given you the impetus to do your own thinking but at the same time that they have given you the idea that there are other solutions and other beliefs to be respected. If you can remember that during your next 50-60 years then I have fulfilled my task.”

Ari was devoted to Ans, his wife, friend and help-mate; she predeceased him in 2005. He was proud of his three children, Richard, Arianne, Andrew and their families, who survive him.

*Patricia A. Johnson, Chair; Howard Evans; Janet McCue*