held at the All Faiths Chapel on the KSU campus on October 11, 2009 and memorial memorabilia have been placed in the anteroom of the Kansas State Department of Psychology.

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Exemplifying the Influence of Childhood Experience: Robert N. Butler

Nora O'Brien-Suric—John A. Hartford Foundation
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Robert Neil Butler (1927-2010), a psychiatrist, pioneer longevity expert, and advocate of the aging, died at age 83 of acute leukemia on July 4 after a highly productive life, only three days after last working. In his Pulitzer Prize-wining 1975 book, *Why Survive? Being Old in America*, he expressed his passionate belief that "human beings need the freedom to live with change, to invent and reinvent themselves a number of times through their lives." He worked to end prejudices against older people, coining the term "ageism," and pointed out that Alzheimer's is far from inevitable among those who live long lives.

In addition to about 300 articles and chapters of books, Dr. Butler wrote or co-authored *The Longevity Prescription: The 8 Proven Keys to a Long, Healthy Life* (2010); *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial and Biomedical Approaches* (1998); *Life in an Older America* (2001); *The New Love and Sex After 60* (2002 with his late wife, Myrna L. Lewis); and other books.

Butler's enormous accomplishments included the founding directorship of the National Institute on Aging and

helping to start and lead the Alzheimer's Disease Association, the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, and the International Longevity Center. He advocated for the aging before Congress, the public, and the United Nations, and served as chair of the President's White House Conference on Aging in 1995. Quite importantly, he inspired numerous workers in what has become a major field of study in a country in which the life span has been extended on average by 30 years in the 20th century.

Butler as an Exemplar of the Impact of Childhood on Adult Accomplishment

Butler wrote that it was in his childhood that his life mission emerged. In less than a year after his birth in Manhattan on January 21, 1927, his parents separated; he was then raised on a chicken farm in Vineland, New Jersey by his maternal grandparents. His revered grandfather told wonderful stories and involved the small boy in the care of ill chickens at one end of the chicken house, called "the hospital." However, Butler suffered a terrible loss when his grandfather simply "disappeared" without anyone telling him what happened to him. When finally the boy learned his beloved grandfather had died, he deeply resented not being told. Honesty in dealing with issues of aging and death therefore became a lifelong value.

A local doctor helped him through scarlet fever and then took him on his medical rounds in his horse and buggy. The boy thought that if he had been a doctor, as he was to the chickens, he could have helped keep his grandfather alive. In the Great Depression his grandmother lost the farm, leaving the two of them to live on government surplus food, living in a run down hotel, which then burned down. His grandmother became a model of enormous endurance, resilience, and strength in the struggle for survival of the elderly.

In medical school, Robert Butler found he was taught

little of value in the treatment of his elderly patients, so he began to study the biology of the aging body. As a research psychiatrist, he probed the nervous system of older people and he was part of Ralph Nader's investigation of nursing homes. His identification with older people was quite intense; for example, he defended as "life review" the inclination of many elderly people to return to old memories. Two years ago he noted that he had come to fear death less than in earlier years. His was a life well-lived in fulfilling a childhood dream of helping beloved grandparents.

A Gerontologist Remembers Robert Butler

Although I have been a gerontologist for about 25 years, I never imagined that Dr. Butler could or would die. Bob has been a presence in my life since I read *Why Survive? Being Old in America* in the early 1980s. I had already decided on a career in aging, focused on geriatric mental health. He was my hero; he had dedicated his life and career to creating a better society for older people, and I planned on doing the same.

While I had an opportunity to meet him in person when I began working at an aging foundation in 1994, I was both thrilled and intimidated. I was too nervous to speak, but he couldn't have been more gracious and was completely down to earth and quite helpful. He advised the Brookdale Fellowship program I worked on and then I went to work with him at the International Longevity Center (ILC) (www.ilcusa.org). I was always impressed with Bob's abundant knowledge. He could see and say things in a way that no one else could. For instance, he didn't believe in the widely held option that longevity and population aging are economic threats that put a drain on society; he truly believed that health and longevity create wealth. So he commissioned a study to investigate his theory (the report can be accessed at: www.ilcusa.org/pages/media_items/do-health-and-longevity-create-wealth75.php). He believed that health re-

sults in productive engagement throughout life, and he was living proof of that.

Bob Butler was always optimistic, with boundless energy. Each day he had a dozen new ideas. We worked on many projects at once, and while I would need to take a break, he seemed to become more energized the busier he became. We as coworkers fondly called him the "Energizer Bunny." He was a most approachable Renaissance man, who believed strongly that providing appropriate care to older people required an interdisciplinary team. He hired staff from various disciplines and always sought our input on everything. Everyone at the ILC read and commented on chapters of his book, *The Longevity Revolution: The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life* (2008).

The need for all health care professionals to receive support for training in geriatrics is something he worked hard for, lobbying Congress for geriatric fellowship awards for physicians. He planned on doing the same for nurses and social workers once he got his foot in the door. My colleagues and I will honor the memory of Robert N. Butler by working even harder to advance his vision of interdisciplinary geriatric care to build a better society for older people.

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