**PROFESSOR POUNDS’ PENULTIMATE CHRISTMAS**

--I got a brand new girlfriend

We went and jumped off the deep end,

Flew to LA for the weekend.

She makes me feel just like a kid again.

Lyrics from a country song,

(Steve Holy, 2006)

My daughter Dian frequently babysat for Professor and Mrs. Pounds, usually on a Friday or Saturday night. They had two sweet little girls, Gail, age 3, and Jennifer, age 6. Dian loved to babysit the little girls and put them to bed and then watch TV. Besides, the Pounds paid well.

As Christmas 1973 was approaching and as Dian was wanting a bicycle for Christmas and as she discovered that the Pounds had a girl’s bicycle for sale, a deal was in the works.

Dian and I walked down the street to the Pounds’ house on great oak drive in the new subdivision of Waverly Woods in Athens, Georgia. I rang the doorbell, and Mrs. Pounds, Jean, answered, came outside, and took us around to inspect the bike. It appeared to be in good condition. Dian hopped on and took it for a spin. Jean Pounds had gotten a new bike better suited for her fairly long daily rides.

Jean Pounds turned out to have an extraverted personality and proved to be quite loquacious in her obvious Scottish accent. She shifted from topic to topic, at one point telling me that they were having a Christmas guest from Scotland, a woman they had both known in graduate school at the University of Edinburgh. The visitor, Pauline, had been a student of her husband Alistair. Jean said she was certainly surprised to hear that Pauline was coming for Christmas. But then, jean declared proudly, “You know, Alastair is such a well-known international research scholar in pharmacology that I guess Pauline wants him to help her get a job in the United States. I got my Ph.D. under Alastair as well, but I have to admit that Pauline was more into research. All I got was a husband,” she said happily.

I thought to myself, “What a wonderful marriage.”

As we were talking, I saw Professor Pounds step out of the front door. He glanced sideways at me. I gave him a wave and a hello. He said nothing. That would be the penultimate time I would see Professor Pounds in person.

Dian returned from circumnavigation of the neighborhood. She said it rode well. I said, “We’ll take it,” and forked over the required $25. Dian rode home. I walked.

As I walked home, I realized I had just seen one of the most eminent of all my faculty colleagues, an expert on toxicology. I recalled the great hoopla surrounding the “stealing” of Professor Pounds away from the world-class University of California, Berkley. In an odd way I felt good that the Pounds had chosen our Waverly Woods neighborhood in which to live.

The next morning, about 9:30 immediately following my morning lecture, I went to the main geography office to check my mail. Audrey Hawkins, secretary in charge of graduate student matters, stopped me. She asked, “Dr. Wheeler, isn’t Professor Pounds one of your neighbors? Did you know his wife died last night? It’s in the *Athens Daily News.* It says she died of a stroke.”

I was flat-footed! I had picked up my daughter at their house about 10:00 the night before after she had babysat.

More and more information became available and rumors circulated during the rest of the day. It was said her husband awoke during the night and found his wife dead. She was only 32. After attempting to revive her, he called 911.

The paper said he said she died of a stroke. (In addition to his Ph.D., Professor Pounds had a medical degree.)

And Christmas was only 10 days away in 1973.

That evening I asked Dian how they were when they returned home. She replied, “Normal, except that Mrs. Pounds had complained of a headache. That’s why they came home early. I think he gave her an aspirin or something with a coke.”

We were all stunned by this unexpected tragedy, and right in our very own little suburban community. We all suffered great grief and felt sincere sympathy for Professor Pounds, so recently arrived in Athens, and the two little girls, whom he will now have to raise alone.

That evening as I was watching channel 2, ABC Atlanta, covering the Athens anguish just down the street, the phone rang. The call was for Dian. After she answered, she glanced at me, saying, “It’s Professor Pounds and he wants me to babysit.” I replied, “O.K.,” thinking he needed time to make arrangements.

My wife and I went out for dinner that evening to the Prime Time, the premier steak house in Athens. The hostess took our name and we retired to the lounge to wait for a table.

My eyes were unbelieving as I spied Professor Pounds at a corner table with an attractive young woman. They were actually holding hands across the table! Again, he looked at me sideways, now the second and last time I would see him in person.

The next time I glanced his way, he had shifted with his back to me. The next time I glance his way, they were gone, out the back door, not into the dining room.

I picked up Dian at 11:30 that night, much later than usual.

As soon as she got in the car, she started to cry. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

Here I will depart from my narrative format and summarize the salient points of her emotional outpouring of her evening experience:

There was this strange lady who answered the door. She only had on her underwear. Professor Pounds was already dressed, and sitting and reading a newspaper. The girls were watching TV. This lady went straight into the bedroom. She soon came out, dressed and ready to go. It was really weird.

When they returned just now, they seemed a little drunk. He called her Pauline.

Who is she?

I tried to calm Dian down, though I was upset myself and totally flabbergasted by the singular evening episode.

That was the last time Dian would babysit for Professor Pounds.

When we got home, my wife said, “Call the police.” I said I would sleep on it, as I was nearly stupefied by professor Pounds’ gross arrogance and indecency.

The next morning, after my first lecture, I called Professor Byron McNally in the School of Pharmacy, having previously served on the Library Committee with him. I asked for an audience and was soon striding to his office, room 154 of the Pharmacy Building. He was actually a great, great grandson of Rand-McNally fame, hence the initial basis for our mutual Library Committee rapport.

I gave him all of my intelligence regarding Professor Pounds and my unintended, interwoven involvement during his wife-dead pre-Christmas. Professor McNally was of course astonished, but he then recounted a curious experience also observed by several other members of the Pharmacy faculty, in which Professor Pounds was espied cavorting with a young female at the annual meeting of the National Association of Pharmacists in Denver, Colorado.

Professor McNally now went to the other side of his office and produced a reprint of a publication by professor Pounds and a Pauline McClendon from an obscure academic journal entitled *The Austrian Pharmacy Review.* Professor McNally summarized the findings of the article, published in German:

The poison or toxin has two unique and remarkable characteristics: (1) It leaves no trace or markers in the body after two hours following death as it dissipates or dissolves naturally in the body and (2) it increases blood pressure some fivefold, inducing a massive stroke. It is thus deadly, within 30-40 minutes.

Professor McNally also counseled me to contact the police.

I called Detective W.J. Smith of the Clarke County Sheriff’s Office and offered to meet with him and provide all the sordid details about a possible homicide.

His was a was terse and surprisingly cool response. He said, “O.K. Give it to me now.”

I laid it all out as he listened patiently, to which he then abruptly replied, “Look, the coroner ruled it a stroke—a blood clot in the brain. All you’ve got is circumstantial stuff and a sick and vulgar mind. Case closed!” I guess he meant a lewd and lascivious mind.

Well, I guess I had a pretty good Christmas.

When the University of Georgia reopened on January 4, 1974, all the campus was abuzz. The story is that professor Pounds and his new girlfriend had flown to Las Vegas and were married on Christmas Day.

I called Professor McNally, who lambasted Alastair Pounds as “a deranged. Megalomaniac whose behavior is beyond the limits of human.”

Even so, it turned out, that professors Pounds—plural—had already accepted faculty appointments at Yale University for Spring Semester, 1974. Professor McNally thundered, “It should be hail, not Yale.”

What is the definition of *premeditated*?

The University of Georgia administrators were no doubt pleased to see the front-page stories end in the local newspaper, but not before a judge ruled in favor of exhumation of jean Pounds’ body.

The tests for toxins, a suspected cause of death, were inconclusive.

Did the professors Pounds live happily ever after?

Here I insert the lyrics from the country song:

“I got a brand new girlfriend. We went and jumped off the deep end.”

Shortly after Christmas one year later, in January of 1975, I was reading the weekly *Chronicle of Higher Education* when I came across the headline, “Yale Professor Found Dead on Christmas Day.”

Alastair Pounds—that esteemed professor—had suffered a fatal, massive stroke in his sleep. His wife had confessed to murdering him using the same obscure toxin he had used to kill his wife, described in scientific scholarly German prose in their jointly authored article in the unrenowned *Austrian Pharmacy Review.*

The motive for this audacious, copycat killing: Alastair Pounds got another brand-new girlfriend. Pauline was quoted as saying, “So I killed him before he could kill me. It was self-defense.”

Happy Holidays!