Arthur Canfield Upton, M.D., died on February 14, 2015. He was that rare individual — a true giant and leader in his field of radiation science and a true gentleman and Renaissance man.

During an illustrious career that spanned seven decades, Art was director of the National Cancer Institute, chairman of the National Academy of Sciences BEIR V committee, president of the Radiation Research Society, and president of the American Association for Cancer Research.

Art held many academic positions including professor of pathology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Director of the Institute of Environmental Medicine at New York University, Clinical Professor of Environmental and Community Medicine at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Clinical Professor of Pathology and Radiology at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

Art was internationally recognized for his research on the health effects of ionizing radiation. He worked with Jacob Furth in the 1950s at the Biology Division at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and subsequently became “the leading expert in radiation pathology.” “Operation Greenhouse” was a monumental experimental study of the pathologic effects of ionizing radiation.

He was born on February 27, 1923, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he spent his childhood. His interest in becoming a physician was deep-rooted in childhood after seeing his mother nursed back to health after a serious struggle with pneumonia. He graduated from the Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and subsequently from the University of Michigan where he received both his Bachelors and Medical Degrees. Later, he lived in New York City in the Village where he and his wife enjoyed the music, the art and the theatre along the “Great White Way.” His wife and a daughter are both artists.

In 1977 President Jimmy Carter appointed Art as Director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) where he was responsible for overseeing the nation’s broad program of research into the causes, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. I came to NCI the same year as Art and because of our radiation backgrounds, we were linked to tumultuous issues. Mammography screening of asymptomatic women for the early detection of breast cancer came to the forefront and there was concern that the radiation exposures might be more detrimental than the early detection benefit. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) held their first consensus conference in 1977 to address this topic. During the Three Mile Island accident, Art provided important government guidance and testimony with regard to the potential health effects from the nuclear accident. Occasionally I would accompany him during Congressional testimony and, to my chagrin, had to do it alone when he was out of town, including accompanying NIH Director Don Fredericksen and Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW) Joseph Califano who testified before the John Glenn senatorial hearings just after the TMI accident — and after the early release of the BEIR III report. Dr. Upton’s guidance brought balance and clarity to these volatile times of uncertainty.

He rarely rode in an elevator and would walk the 11 floors to the top of his office building at NIH, not because of a fear of elevators, but rather a desire for exercise. I still have the letter he wrote in 1977 thanking me for sending a copy of my doctoral thesis that was relevant to the issues of mammography screening and risk of radiation-induced breast cancer.