Dr. John Pratt once lost a job offer from the Pentagon because of his insistence that in every speech he would write for the general, he must be allowed to tell the truth. This unwavering integrity marks the legacy of Dr. Pratt.

Born on August 19, 1932, John grew up in Darien, Connecticut. Most of his time as a boy was spent away at Eaglebrook School and Phillips Academy Andover, though his free time was spent skiing in the winter and fishing in the summer. He remembers working at a gas station, selling fuel for 25.5 cents per gallon.

Like his father, John attended Dartmouth College, with the intention of becoming a construction engineer. However, when he showed his poetry to an attractive female friend, she encouraged him to become an English major. So he did. Ultimately, he earned an English degree, graduating from the University of Berkley, where he had transferred for his senior year.

Having no intention of teaching or attending graduate school, John enlisted in the Air Force cadet program and became a fighter jet flight instructor. After accepting an English teaching position at the Air Force Academy, the Academy paid his way to Columbia to earn his master’s degree. Upon returning, he became the first English teacher at the Academy to publish a book, and so he was sent to Princeton to earn his doctorate. As a lieutenant colonel, John continued to teach at the Academy. He also traveled throughout Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam on top-secret missions with the CHECO program, flying eight different types of aircraft. Finally, after losing the Pentagon job offer because of his integrity, John was hired as Colorado State University’s chair of the English department in 1975.

In his twenty-six years at CSU, John credits his students with having the most influence on his life. One of his greatest legacies was appointing Rosemary Whitaker to succeed him as the first female head of the English department. “My having five daughters gave me a very different – and very admiring – opinion of women,” he explains. John’s convictions were not always welcome, however. Once, he confronted President Ray Chamberlain about the underhanded practice of paying graduate students to write and test for undergraduate football players, threatening to take the information to the Denver Post. Though he earned lifelong resentment from Chamberlain, his stand won freedom for his department from this corruptive practice.

Though his focus remained on justice and teaching, John’s scholarship also proved impressive. Twice a Fulbright Scholar, he taught in the Soviet Union and Portugal. He has published forty to fifty scholarly articles and ten books, the most recent being *American Affairs*, published in 2010. His master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation proved noteworthy because of their unique and insightful focus on discovering little known influences that shaped famous authors. For example, John pointed out that Hemingway was immensely shaped by his Catholic religion and that George Eliot constantly, yet subtly, mocked prestigious authors like Shakespeare. “English teachers don’t really read,” John states. “They re-read.”

He expects that one of the major issues that CSU will face in the future is how to promote education, as opposed to training. He explains that CSU currently “creates a lot of workers and not a lot of leaders” because degrees in the humanities are becoming so specified, “making people more singular than open.” If he were to offer advice to a new professor, he would explain, “If the world is going to change,
one of the biggest problems is going to be maintaining the values and literary beliefs you now have.” Dr. Pratt’s own uncompromising life proves his advice.