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General and Comparative Endocrinology 134 (2003) 203–204

GENERAL AND COMPARATIVE
ENDOCRINOLOGYwww.elsevier.com/locate/yggen

In Memoriam

Aubrey Gorbman (1914–2003)

Aubrey Gorbman, a truly heroic figure in the development of comparative endocrinology, has died, leaving a vacuum, which will not be easily filled, even by several younger figures in our field acting together. Aubrey was too real all of his life to be called “legendary,” but he provided dynamic leadership virtually until the day he died, witnessed as a great legacy for all of us, both younger and older colleagues and followers.

For some time, there has been a continuing attempt to pin the term “father of comparative endocrinology” on a particular senior endocrinologist. Bennett M. Allen, Emil Witschi, Grace Pickford (a mother can also be a father!), Ernest J.W. Barrington, Maurice Fontaine, and others, including the senior member of this writing team, have been so dubbed. It is easy enough to “father” a field, consciously or not, but a real parental role involves more than just the conception; it also involves the raising of the offspring: deliberate and ingenious cultivation of the field once conceived. In this respect, Aubrey Gorbman was a father among fathers. He, along with Ian Chester Jones of Sheffield University, saw that the field of comparative endocrinology grew and prospered and recruited. Gorbman and Chester Jones were truly special: they not only initiated the recognition of our field of endeavor but also nurtured its development over the years—over the decades.

Gorbman organized the Second International Symposium on Comparative Endocrinology at Cold Spring Harbor (and materially assisted with the Third at Oiso, Japan); he founded our journal *General and Comparative Endocrinology* (and continued as its editor-in-chief for many years after); he established the Division of Comparative Endocrinology in the American Society of Zoologists, now the Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology (and thus provided impetus for the organization of similar societies in other countries and continents); he coauthored the first textbook of comparative endocrinology. All these events occurred in the early 1960s and resulted in a real flowering of our field, both nationally and internationally.

Aubrey was born in Detroit in 1914 and was educated at Wayne State University and at the University of California at Berkeley, where he received his Ph.D. in zoology in 1940. At Berkeley, he met Genevieve, also a zoology graduate student, who became his wife. These were successes indeed for a struggling student in the depression years of the late 1930s. After postdoctoral time spent with H.M. Evans at Berkeley and at other institutions, Gorbman moved back to Wayne State University and within a few years on to Barnard College and Columbia University in New York City, where he eventually chaired the Department of Zoology. In 1963, he made a major move to become chairperson of the Zoology Department of the University of Washington in Seattle, where he served as active professor and emeritus professor until his death.

Despite all his organizational and academic responsibilities, Aubrey Gorbman was first and foremost an experimental biologist of topnotch quality, whose research programs were marked by ingenuity and innovation and thoroughness of investigation. In these sustained research efforts, he was an inspiring mentor of graduate students and of postdoctoral associates. His internationalism brought students and collaborators in both categories from around the world to his dynamic and interactive laboratory, both at Columbia and at Seattle. He also spent productive times at a variety of overseas laboratories, adding the strength and originality of his research drives to the places and people he visited.

Aubrey conducted major investigations on the comparative aspects of thyroid function, its evolution, and physiology. He participated in dramatic advances in our understanding of cyclostome and protochordate endocrinology. In the last year of his life, he proposed a startling role for GnRH as a regulator of spawning in animals generally, with its control evolved among the invertebrates.

During a career as long and as productive as Gorbman's, the variety of experience and the amount of innovative activity, not only scientific but also social, are impressive. He is identified not only with scientific advances but also with the modernization of our field and with its increasing professionalism. Not the least aspect of his professional activity was his admirable devotion to the advancement of women in our discipline and in academe in general. Aubrey was a firmly encouraging colleague and mentor to women, as well as to men. He recognized the value of his students independently developing their maximum potential. Aubrey always remained a quintessential teacher, sharing his knowledge and ideas not only with his Ph.D. students and postdoctoral research associates in his own laboratory but also with a much wider circle of sometimes more senior colleagues, who valued his advice on developing new ideas and techniques. President Clinton paid him great honor in recognition of his vital contribution to our professional well-being by giving him the 1998 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring.

Aubrey was a family man, and his students and postdoctorals often became an extension of his family life. His late wife was a generous and affectionate hostess, and she and his daughters, Beryl, Leila, Claudia, and Pam, and his son, Eric, were in contact with his larger scientific family. His extended professional family and his colleagues from around the world join his immediate family and the undersigned in mourning his loss. The memory of an academic giant and a close personal friend will remain with us and with a grateful profession long into the future.

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