

Obituary

In memoriam Peter W. Lampert

Peter W. Lampert was born in Munich on April 9, 1929, and was educated in Bad Homburg and Frankfurt, Germany. His father was a Professor of Physical Medicine with a distinguished reputation in his field. Peter was the eldest boy of four children and learned independence and responsibility at an early age while his father was away on military service. He graduated from school in 1947 and faced difficulties in obtaining higher education because of great competition for University places after the war. Having a natural aptitude for languages, he studied first at the Berlitz School in Frankfurt and then at the University of Saarland, becoming proficient in French and English. In 1949 he went to the University of Montpellier, the second oldest School of Medicine in the western world, and later studied at the University of Paris before returning to Frankfurt where he completed his medical education at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in 1955. Subsequently, he immigrated into the United States where he was an intern in Knoxville, Tennessee and a resident in Pueblo, Colorado. He went to Canada for his training in pathology, working at the University of Toronto as a resident from 1957 to 1961. His interest in Neuropathology developed under Jerzy Olszewski whose fine work on the cytoarchitectonics of the brain stem impressed him deeply. However, his research training began in earnest when he arrived at the Armed Forces Institute in Washington. During his eight years at the A.F.I.P. he refined his skills in diagnostic neuropathology and trained himself in electron micrography winning recognition not only for originality of his experimental work but also for the great quality and visual impact of his electron micrographs. He was appointed Chief of Experimental Neuropathology at the A.F.I.P. in 1965. His years in Washington were happy and productive and among his research interests during this period were the spongiform encephalopathies which he studied in collaboration with Carleton Gajdusek and Joseph Gibbs



at the National Institute of Health. In later years when residents and staff sometimes were afraid to autopsy patients with Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, he would go to the morgue and remove the brain with bare hands, saying that he had taken brains from many infected monkeys in the same manner without ill effect.

Peter and Anne Lampert came to San Diego in 1969 where he joined the faculty of the University of

California, San Diego, as Professor at UCSD of Pathology. As the first neuropathologist, he quickly became known to the medical community as their consultant, and in the School as an authority in both clinical and research aspects of his field.

His teaching was marked by a crisp, incisive style of delivery supplemented by beautiful illustrations, all derived from his own practice and research. While he strove to teach the common things with uncommon clarity, students remember in particular the film he liked to show of Kuru patients in New Guinea. Having drawn their attention by its overtones of cannibalism, he would patiently explain that it was through cuts and abrasions that the virus would infect its host rather than by patients ingesting their next of kin. In discussing the pathology of alcoholism he would counsel his teaching colleagues to emphasize the nutritional disorders associated with the alcoholic life style and not be too censorious about the noble refreshment which he enjoyed in moderation. While he loved to weave research themes into his teaching, his first goal was always to leave the students with some practical information to be used in a subsequent hour of clinical need. He became very eloquent about the neuropathology of boxing; his only crusade. He was repelled by a sport whose object is to inflict injury. Knowing it would not be stopped, he hoped to disseminate his concerns through medical education. Characteristically, he would emphasize that the dangers of boxing lie in brain injury from repetitive pummeling rather than in dramatic knockouts in the ring.

In research, the pathogenesis of multiple sclerosis (MS) was a lifelong interest, first declared in his medical school thesis in 1955. Once he became established in experimental pathology, MS provided a focus for his academic career. Impressed by Lumsden's demonstrations of oligodendroglial loss in MS and by epidemiologic evidence favoring viral infection in its etiology, he looked for animal models of demyelinating disease and devoted the last 15 years of his research career to two demyelinating murine viral encephalomyelitides. He was especially proud of the electron micrographs showing viral infection of oligodendroglia inducing proliferative changes in these cells and abnormalities of remyelination. Per-

haps his most beautiful work described the fine structural changes of experimental allergic neuritis, while the most cited papers dealt with regenerative, degenerative and dystrophic changes of axons. He would be the first to deny any esthetic motivation in his research, yet this aspect ran like a subconscious tide through all his papers. He would tolerate no technical shortfall, recognizing that lack of elegance in presentation may subvert the results of good work.

In 1977 he became Chairman of his Department and was faced with new challenges which brought to light many abilities unsuspected by even close colleagues. It was a case of "the office seeks the man" and during his seven years of service he built up a strong department while winning the respect and affection of colleagues and staff.

It is hard to describe a truly exceptional man, but the qualities we remember are a mixture of contrasts. He was businesslike but humorous, intellectually rigorous but open to new ideas, vigorous in conviction yet flexible in debate. Above all, a wonderfully supple intellect, a constant interest in new directions, a willingness to confront difficult problems but to consider opposing points of view and impulse to quick decision tempered by a great sense of fairness are cherished in memory. Those whom he taught remember his delight in implanting new ideas in other people's minds, encouraging their work and giving them the credit. In the academic milieu where selfishness is not unknown, he was invariably generous to others and remarkably modest about his own contributions. He knew that progress in science rests more in the totality of effort than in satisfying personal ambitions. Secure and at peace with himself, he understood the value of fostering young talent. His untimely loss is most keenly felt by family, colleagues and friends, but his memory is our greatest consolation.

Concluding with the words of William Shakespeare:

"He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one;
Exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading;
To those men that sought him
Sweet as summer."

H. C. Powell, La Jolla