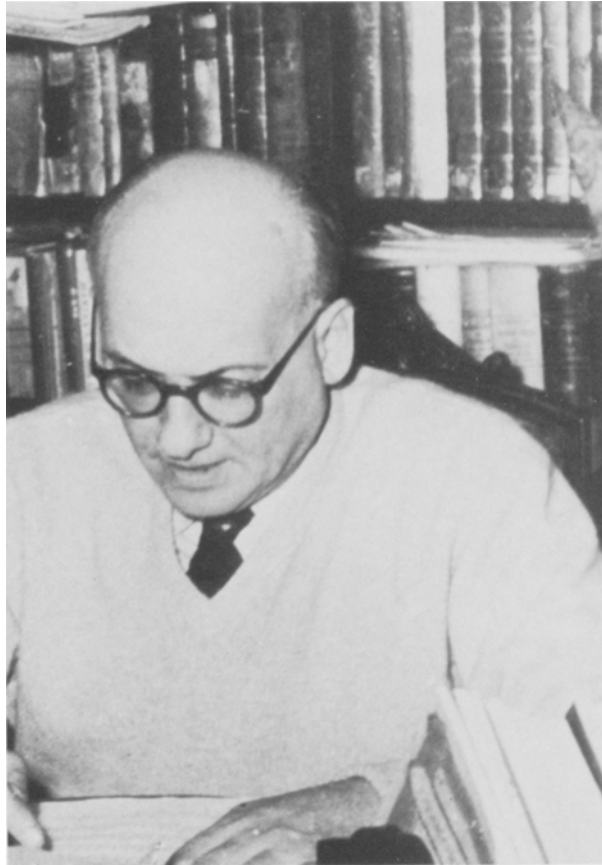


## Obituary



**Alfred Berndorfer**  
1904-1985

Alfred Berndorfer is dead. Alfred Berndorfer, who described the syndrome of the "bilateral cheilognathopalatoschisis with lobster hands," who established the regeneration theory of multifactor-induced deformities, who treated and cared for the largest number of patients with the most serious deformities, who was a humble scientist and a shining example for many young physicians at many medical conventions throughout the world is dead.

Within the various fields of medicine, in many different countries, it will be noted with sadness: Alfred Berndorfer of Budapest has passed away. How come? Why such an involvement? How could a physician from a small country win so many

friends, spread joy, and provide inspiration to others? What special gift had the muses placed into his cradle? Why do people mourn who saw him but rarely?

Perhaps his greatness was not even derived from his specialized skills, although he made many original contributions to pediatrics—teratology in particular—and to his own specialty of plastic surgery as well as to many related fields of medicine. Based on 30 years of friendship with him, I suppose that it was not his vast knowledge—although Alfred Berndorfer had an extraordinarily wide range of knowledge—no, it was rather his humanity, his dignity, and tolerance that made him such a very special person. Whoever had the privilege of becoming closely acquainted with Freddi Berndorfer will never forget him.

Born July 12, 1904, in a tiny village close to Buda-

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pest, he grew up amid a harmonious family environment. His father was a dentist. Even as a child he made friends for a lifetime. I know his friends from the days of his childhood: Ladislav Segy, who has been living in New York since 1936 and has become one of the best known authorities on Africa. Berndorfer experienced World War I first hand, the revolutionary years 1919 and 1920 having been particularly hard on Hungary. As many other patriots, his father had invested his entire fortune in government war bonds, and now he had to find ways and means to provide for his family. Thus, Berndorfer was bent on finishing school as early as possible so he could enroll in medical college. He would consider only one university, Breslau (now Wrocław), the one where his father went and had been Partsch's assistant. As a member of Scheff's staff in Vienna, his father had met his mother, from an old Viennese family. As a result, only German was spoken in the Berndorfer home, and Alfred grew up bilingually.

Inflation had meanwhile erupted in Germany. Berndorfer thus managed to live on \$4.00 per month. Upon the introduction of the new Rentenmark currency, his father was no longer able to support him in Germany so he continued his studies in Vienna. In 1926, Berndorfer returned to the university of Pecs in Hungary, where he obtained his doctorate in 1929.

Because of his musical skills—he was an excellent pianist and violinist—he had the good fortune to be admitted as a prime violinist to a home quartet of well-known physicians in Breslau. Thus, he became acquainted with the famous pathologist Prof. Henke, the officiating dean Prof. Richard Pfeiffer (Pfeiffer's glandular fever), and the anatomist Baron von Eckelind. His acquaintance with the famous surgeon Hermann Küttner was extremely important to his career. That brilliant surgeon became to the young physician an example to be emulated.

Berndorfer had some extraordinary teachers—Minkowski, Fraenkel, Jadassohn, Eiselsberg, Wenckebach, and Chwostek. Berndorfer told me that the students would quip: "Bei Wenckebach, bei Wenckebach sind nur die ersten Bänke wach." (In Wenckebach's lecture, only the first few rows keep awake.) In contrast, Chwostek's lectures on internal medicine were "classics." He did not have too high an opinion of Wagner-Jauregg, in contrast with Pirquet, while he had a very special relationship with the famous anatomist Tandler, since his mother was a relative. The years at the Breslau university (1922 to 1925) thus had a very special influence on his personal development.

Berndorfer owed his love for Polyhymnia to his musical studies and his advanced education in musical science during his years at Breslau. The famous Bach research specialist, Max Schneider, admitted Berndorfer to his "collegium musicum," which en-

abled him later on to earn some extra money working part-time as a corepetiteur at the opera and also enabled him to become acquainted with the most popular musical directors of that time.

How could someone indulge in so many varied interests? Next to Berndorfer's personality, this ability was also attributable to his intelligence and his experiences during his youth. This included meeting the famous Leo Frobenius and discovering his love for Africa that he shared with his friend Segy. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Berndorfer had compiled a comprehensive African collection and had even planned to emigrate to Africa.

In his university years in Pecs, Berndorfer spent less time in the lecture halls and more with a dance orchestra and in a movie theater where he accompanied the silent movies on the piano or violin. In this manner he saved enough money to finance a trip to Spain and France in 1927. After graduation, Berndorfer became an assistant to one of the best known surgeons of Budapest. In 1933 he won a scholarship for traumatology which enabled him to work under Lorenz Böhler.

In the 1930s, plastic surgery was still in its early stages in Hungary. Berndorfer's chief urged him to devote himself to reconstructive surgery procedures, in addition to traumatology. Things were especially bad with respect to the treatment of cheilognathopalatoschises. While in Paris, Berndorfer heard of and finally met Vicor Veau and embarked on his lifelong commitment to plastic surgery. With Recamier, Berndorfer was able to assist Veau in his work. Also at this time, Axhausen's work on cheilognathopalatoplasties was published which Berndorfer translated from German to French. This provided an additional contact with Veau. Berndorfer also worked with Claude Dufourmentel, Charles Cloue, and Lamaitre. Unfortunately he had to shorten his stay in Paris because of his sister's illness. Veau, however, asked him to come to Berlin in October 1938 to assist him in a cheiloplasty. Also in Berlin were Axhausen, Ernst, Gohrbandt, Rosenthal, and Pichler.

This contact with Victor Veau and his pupils was the turning point in Berndorfer's career. Although he met several other colleagues around Victor Veau, such as Fogh-Andersen, Sr. and the young Sanvenero-Rosselli—whose friendship lasted a lifetime—the decisive factors were Veau's character, his nobility, and his generosity which Alfred Berndorfer adopted as his role model.

His experience with congenital deformities paved the way for his professional career in Budapest. He eventually became head of the department for extremely deformed patients who came from all over Hungary. His scientific work and his contacts with genetic research workers like Degenhardt, anatomists like Töndury, and embryologists like Nishi-

mura made him internationally known. He was one of the few scientists who were appointed honorary or corresponding members of scientific societies in both the East and the West. He had honorary membership of the Cuban Academy of Science, was a member of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, was awarded the Romay and the Purkinje medals, and received many other marks of distinction.

The Contergan era saw him in the fore. In those days he discovered the syndrome that bears his name.

I first met Berndorfer in 1955 during the First International Congress for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in Stockholm and maintained close contact with him ever since. In addition to his monographs, which include "The Esthetics of the Nose," he was copublisher of the *Manual for Plastic Surgery*, to which he contributed numerous articles. He authored approximately 250 papers on medicine, musical science, and, even on philately. To the end of his life we worked on the compilation of a "World Chronicle," a general history for youngsters; he illustrated my text with postage stamps.

Alfred Berndorfer's death closes a chapter in the history of plastic surgery, for he knew all the outstanding leaders in this field and was a friend of quite a few of them, including the famous plastic surgeons Gillies, McIndoe, Kilner, Matthews of England; Conway, Stark, and Millard; his French colleagues Morel-Fatio, Aubry, Dufourmentel, Ombredanne, and Escoffier; the Scandinavians Skoog,

Aschan, Hogemann, Johannson, and Nylen; and Rosenthal, Trauner, Schuchardt, Pfeiffer, and Eduard Schmid. His friendships with Gonzales-Ulloa and Pitanguy provided Berndorfer an opportunity to visit their countries.

Shortly after his 80th birthday, he stayed with Gerhard Pfeiffer and me. On this occasion he gave me his personal legacy; "Thus I have lived, felt, and seen so much and can now—in my serene and happy old age—make the following statement: I have lived, as far as possible, well and with pleasure and beauty. But I always dug up the beauty out of the dirt of everyday life. I always endeavored, even during the most terrible and awful times, to discover beauty, and I came to the conclusion that the realistic optimist will find beauty within all ugliness and ugliness within all beauty. I would compare myself with Till Eulenspiegel (the famous fool) who rejoiced going uphill and lamented going downhill: for uphill he faced the pleasure of the easy descent, whereas during the descent he had to think all the time of the uphill climb, and this applies also to myself."

Berndorfer has passed away. Many will rightly say that his was a life of fulfillment and beauty. For those who knew him and his vitality, sympathy, dedication to work, and love of his wife Evi—a well-known Hungarian scientist, his sudden death at 82 remains incomprehensible. And yet this rapid passing away demonstrates once more the blessing under which Alfred Berndorfer lived.

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