

Introduction

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For most of the second half of the 20th century, the intramural program of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was one of the leading research centers for neurochemistry, attracting the brightest and the best from around the globe. Throughout this period, Julius Axelrod was the scientific soul of this Institute. Following his death in December, 2004, many of his students, post-docs, and colleagues gathered at the NIH to pay their respects in just the way that Julie would have wanted it, with a lot of science and a little humor. The papers in this special issue of CEMN are, in part, the result of this tribute to Julie.

Julie arrived at NIH in 1950, initially in the National Heart Institute with James Shannon. In 1955, after receiving his PhD (at age 42), Julie was recruited to the NIMH to set up a section on pharmacology in a laboratory led by Ed Evarts. For nearly five decades he worked quietly and carefully in his small laboratory in the Clinical Center, a true scientist's scientist. In addition to his discoveries, his mentoring, and his collegiality, one of his lasting gifts was the Julie model for doing science. Unfailingly curious about chemical mechanisms, Julie had an extraordinary ability to sniff out the important problem and to know the right experiment to solve it. In a field where many put a premium on focus, Julie was scientifically agile, "skimming the cream," as he would say, in a new area and leaving it to others to fill in the details. And in an era when most "successful" scientists became administrators over large laboratories or departments, Julie resisted all offers to leave the bench. In fact, until very late in his career, he avoided having an office. He kept a desk in the laboratory a few feet from the bench. Always mindful of staying ahead of the field, Julie could be found every morning in the library or at his desk scrutinizing the latest journals.

What is perhaps most remarkable is that this gifted scientist, who discovered so many of the fundamentals of modern neuropharmacology and was recognized with the highest awards in science, remained personally humble and generous throughout his career. He was not only a scientist's scientist, Julie was a mensch. His fortitude, curiosity, and abiding love for science and discovery set a tone for the culture of the intramural program. If you had a scientific question, he was always available. If you had a good idea, he was interested. And if you were one of the fortunate students or post-docs to train with him, he was a mentor for life. It has been said that institutions

are only as good as the people within them. For the intramural program at NIMH, Julie was as good as it gets. He loved the study of basic biochemical mechanisms and he loved seeing the translation of his discoveries to benefit public health. He closed his final review paper (“Journey of a late-blooming biochemical neuroscientist,” *JBC*, 278:1–13, 2003), “During my career in biomedical research, the work was largely its own reward. In retrospect, however, a great satisfaction that I have about my work is that it led to treatments for the relief of pain and depression.”

I am grateful to all who contributed to this special issue, but most of all to Lee Eiden who worked tirelessly to organize the tribute to Julie in May 2005 and Juan Saavedra for providing this special issue of CEMN. Julie would have enjoyed reading this issue and would have been especially delighted to know that Lee and Juan, two of his “boys” had been the “eager beavers” to make this happen.

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