

OBITUARY

The field of Neurogastroenterology and Motility has lost one of its most distinguished members. On June 1, 2017, Prof. Dr. Hans Jörg Ehrlein died in his home near Lake Constance. He was one of the giants on whose shoulders we stand. Hans Jörg Ehrlein was born in 1933 in Stuttgart, Germany, and studied Veterinary Medicine in Hannover. After graduation he worked for a few years at the Small Animal Clinic at the Veterinary School in Hannover. For many years after he moved to the Institute of Physiology in 1964, pet owners continued to consult him for advice. In 1970 Ehrlein accepted a position as a full Professor and, together with Heiko Hörnicke and Wolfgang von Engelhardt, established the Institute of Animal Physiology at the University of Hohenheim. Since his retirement in 1998, he had lived at the beautiful Lake Constance in the South of Germany. He was an extremely gifted scientist and an outstanding teacher. His ability to inspire his students was exceptional. For all his students, he was like a father who guided us through the minefields of everyday science. And even in his retirement, he continued to show an active interest in the lives and work of all of us who stayed in research.

His contributions to science are everlasting—he was the first to use sophisticated techniques to relate motility to transit. Before he engaged in motility research, he developed methods to test endurance in horses. Besides sailing, horseback riding was his favourite sport until very late in his life. Already in the early days, he was an ingenious tinkerer developing novel devices to measure various physiological parameters relevant for endurance. During his time as a Professor at the University of Hohenheim he had his own equipment workshop. His movies on gastrointestinal transit are mind-blowing and used throughout the world in GI teaching modules. Videofluoroscopy and Ehrlein go hand in hand, and he deserves all the credit for this achievement. I know from my own experience as a teacher how important these movies are for students to understand gut motility. The so-called “Ehrlein-Movies” became a tradition and a highlight at every scientific meeting. One has to consider that there were no computers and beamers at that time. Ehrlein travelled with a 20 kg film projector as hand luggage. At a meeting in Rochester

150 posters had to be re-pinned as the lighting conditions at the original spot were somewhat suboptimal. Very quickly, a crowd of people gathered around the poster as if a movie star presented his latest film.

He will be remembered for his enthusiasm, dedication, sincerity as a scientist and his humility and warmhearted character. I never heard him raise his voice. He loved scientific discussion. I shared a room with him at a scientific meeting in Cambridge—as a true Swabian, Ehrlein also loved to save money—and all night we discussed peristalsis and segmentation, only briefly interrupted by excursions into the life and works of Che Guevara and Castro; Ehrlein was quite a character. Hans Jörg Ehrlein's original intention was to become a practicing veterinarian. He decided in favour of academia because, at that time, he considered it to be a safer job for raising a family. He maintained his love for animals and went as far as reoperating all the dogs to remove the strain gauges used to record motility before giving them away as pets. It helped that he was an exceptionally gifted veterinary surgeon who even taught human surgeons how to perform successful surgeries using dogs.

For those who knew him personally, I do not need to write a wordy appreciation of him as a researcher and a friend. I would inadvertently omit things, and that would not do justice to him. For those of you who did not have the pleasure of meeting him, I recommend looking up his publication record, and you will immediately realize his brilliant mind.

Instead, I would like to share a story (there would be many interesting and also funny ones) that perfectly describes his talent as an all-rounder and a very caring person. One of the dogs given away as a pet kept escaping from his new home and, at some point, became a wild dog. Ehrlein was contacted by the rangers who told him that they would have to shoot the dog. He negotiated with them for several weeks, during which time he was fully absorbed in finding a way to save the life of the animal, which by that time had become extremely shy. For weeks he went into the woods every day to attract the dog to a particular place with food. He then learned how to master a blowtube

(he was not permitted to use a blowgun) and used the hallway of the department as a training ground, as its length of ~20 m corresponded to the distance between the feeding place and his self-made ambush nearby. He knew he had to train hard, as he would only have one shot. He placed a dartboard at the end of the hallway, hooked up an oxygen tank to the blowtube and trained to hit the target. At the beginning, it was an adventure to cross the hallway on the way from the office to the lab, as the darts containing the anaesthetic sped along the hallway on a rather erratic course. But Ehrlein would not give up—when the going gets tough, the tough get going. He quickly became an expert and hit bullseye on a regular basis. Needless to say, he was successful and saved the dog's life.

Personally, I feel very sad to lose the mentor who guided me during my career for a long time. He always had my highest respect and until the very end I called him "Prof" to honor him as an exceptional scientist

and as a precious person. I owe him a lot and so do all of his students. He inspired a number of us to establish a career in academia. I am sure everyone who knew him will share the sadness.

We also feel for his wife, daughter and son who lost a loving father and husband.

"Everything begins and ends at the exactly right time and place"

(from Picnic at Hanging Rock).

Let's use this quote hoping that it is all good (or as we say in German "gut") wherever "Prof" is now.

M. Schemann also on behalf of Ehrlein's many students
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