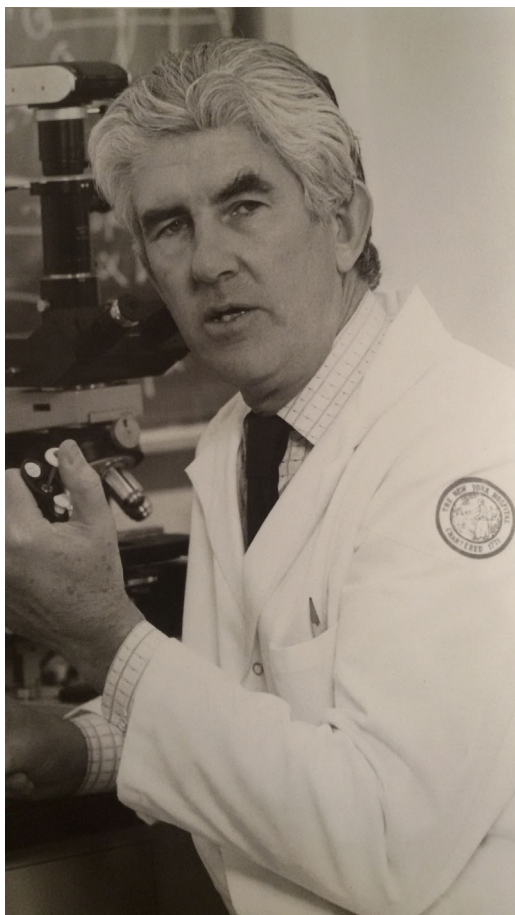


MEMORIUM

Tribute to my mentor, Mike Bedford

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A few months ago, I was happy of writing a letter supporting John Michael Bedford's nomination for a very important award based on his outstanding contribution to the field of reproduction for more than 50 years. I assumed that many letters would already be mentioning his prodigious output of papers and reviews revealing novel aspects of sperm maturation and storage in the epididymis, sperm transport and capacitation within the female tract, the mechanisms and strategies of fertilization and the way the structures and function of gametes have co-evolved. So, I decided to refer to another aspect of his distinguished career: his influence on those that have worked with him. I never imagined that shortly after I would be

writing a tribute to him although with the same admiration and respect that I always felt for whom I consider a "true scientist".

I met "Mike" Bedford in 1984 when I began to work in his laboratory in New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center as an NIH post-doctoral fellow. From the very beginning Mike showed me how to see things and think about them from a broad, evolutionary and physiological rather molecular perspective. Fortunately, I realized very soon I was in front of someone who thought differently, addressed things differently, and was just different. During the two years in his lab, I tried very hard to open my mind and absorb as much as I could from his special mind. It was not always easy for me, a chemist, to follow his way of reasoning and fulfill his expectations but it was always fascinating. As he was already a recognized scientist, I was surprised by the time he used to spend in the lab carrying out the experiments by himself, always with his white coat on. Certainly, I did not find sophisticated equipments or techniques at his lab, I found something much more important: big questions and simple but intelligent ways to approach to them. Not only "hows" but also "whys".

I arrived at his lab at moments when it was almost generally accepted that the mammalian acrosome reaction was induced by the zona pellucida. He was skeptical about this idea which he thought was an extension of what occurred in invertebrates but which could not necessarily be the situation in mammals. It was not easy to go against such an accepted concept but Mike maintained his idea based on numerous personal observations in many species from different mammalian groups. I was happy to contact him with a young researcher who brought the issue to the scene again after 30 years by providing evidence that the sperm might undergo the acrosome reaction before reaching the zona. Mike wrote a nice editorial for this PNAS article and, although he never said it, I guess this was an important moment for him not because he was right but because of the biological significance of these findings. His papers about the enigmas of mammalian fertilization and how the resilient eutherian zona pellucida produced a domino effect on sperm physiology are just beyond the conventional.

Mike's attitude while looking at the microscope, analyzing and interpreting results, or even selecting each word while writing a paper clearly denoted his love for science, a feeling that he successfully

transmitted to his fellows with the same passion that he received it from his mentor, MC Chang. It was moving to hear Mike remembering with so much affection the unforgettable experience of working with Chang and how this has profoundly influenced his career. He was grateful to his mentor and a true mentor for his fellows.

Mike continued opening the field to new questioning until the last minute of his life and I had the privilege of continuing discussing with him about science and life for the past 32 years. I will miss him a lot, probably as much as he missed MC Chang.

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