IN MEMORIAM

BEDE MORRIS, PhD, DVM
LYMPHOLOGIST EXTRAORDINAIRE
1927-1988

The tragic death of Professor Bede Morris on July 2, 1988, in a motor accident while on study leave in Paris has deprived Australia of one of its most outstanding medical scientists. At the age of 61, he had built for himself an international reputation for his research on the lymphatic system, in particular on the role of the lymphocyte and the development of the immune system.

He began his research career in Sydney after graduating in Veterinary Science with First Class Honours and the University Medal in December 1951. As an undergraduate he was a brilliant student, very enthusiastic in everything he undertook. After graduating he told his Dean, Professor Carne, that rather than practice veterinary medicine he would like to try his hand at research. I had recently returned to Australia from Oxford to take up the position of Director of the Kanematsu Memorial Institute at Sydney Hospital and was in the process of building up a team of young researchers interested in the functions of the lymphatic system. Professor Carne rang me to say that he had a brilliant young graduate who wanted to try his hand at research, but he warned me that Morris was at times a little unconventional. Next day Bede Morris rode his bicycle down to Sydney Hospital for an interview. My secretary showed into my office a smiling, alert young man, immaculately dressed in shorts, long socks and shirt—somewhat unusual in a teaching hospital at that time. However, after a pleasant interview I told him that I would give him some bench space and help him to get a start in research, but that I had no funds to pay him a stipend. That did not worry Morris in the least; he went off, quickly got himself a scholarship which was just enough to keep body and soul together, and early in January 1952 turned up to try his hand at research.

I showed him how to cannulate lymphatic vessels with glass cannulae at first, and then with polyethylene cannulae. He was soon collecting lymph from the thoracic duct, liver, intestinal, cervical, and leg ducts. It did not
take me long to realize that Morris had exceptional skills as an experimenter, whether it concerned the necessary animal operation or the setting up of equipment for various measurements, and that he showed outstanding dedication to his work. Although we were at first interested mainly in the proteins in lymph, we soon became interested in the lipoproteins when some of us in the Institute became involved in the etiology of atherosclerosis. Morris was soon investigating the lipoproteins in plasma and in lymph collected from various lymphatic vessels of normal, hypercholesteremic, and hypertriglycerideremic animals.

For four years we worked in close association at the Kanematsu Institute. In that time, it was not difficult to realize that I had an exceptional young medical scientist in my laboratory. His planning and his operational skill were so high that his experiments rarely failed. When he had a long experiment, he would come into the laboratory the night before, get things ready, lie on the floor to snatch a few hours sleep and when he awoke at 4 or 5 a.m. he would start his experiment. Such enthusiasm, such dedication to his experiments, I had never before, nor since, seen in a young man. Certainly he had a very outgoing personality, but here was a scientist with the promise of a brilliant career in research.

In 1956, he was awarded an Overseas Fellowship to work in Sir Howard Florey’s laboratory in Oxford. Here he continued his studies on lipoproteins and chylomicrons, mainly with Dr. John French. It was at this time that Dr. J.L. Gowans was doing his classical experiments which led to the discovery of the recirculation of lymphocytes through nodes.

When he was due to return to Australia in 1958, I had moved to the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University in Canberra. I was very fortunate in being able to persuade Morris to come to my Department of Experimental Pathology. It was here in Canberra that his talents as a research worker really blossomed, first as an independent researcher in my department, and from 1970 as Professor and Head of the newly established Department of Immunology. Morris was able to adopt the merino sheep as his chosen animal of experimentation, for the facilities at the John Curtin School of Medical Research were excellent and gave us much greater scope than was available to us in Sydney. Morris had never been happy with experiments in which he collected lymph over short periods of time from anaesthetized animals. With polyethylene cannulae and the merino sheep as his model, he was able to collect lymph under normal physiological conditions over long periods of time, days, or weeks on end. I still have a slide of his in which he is shown on horseback rounding up a flock of 20 or more sheep. These were not ordinary sheep; each had a catheter in a lymphatic vessel dripping lymph into a bottle sutured to the surface of the body.

The sheep model of lymph collection was ideal for long-term studies on the migration of lymphocytes throughout the body and the changes that follow the introduction of an antigen when an immune response develops. Such experiments often needed much attention, almost 24 hours a day, but it was always a delight to Morris to come into the laboratory at all hours of the night and at all hours at weekends to make sure his experiments were working. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him; the only thing that mattered was the success of the experiments, from which he derived such pleasure.

These early experiments with the trafficking of cells during the development of an immune response naturally led to experiments on organ transplantation in which he developed a model by transplanting the kidney into the neck of a sheep enabling him to collect both lymph and urine from the trans-
planted organ. By this time, he had colleagues working on many projects relating to the structure and function of the lymphatic system.

In 1968, I persuaded him to accompany me to the Second International Congress of Lymphology held in the Fontainebleau Hotel at Miami Beach. To attend an international congress with Morris was an experience of a lifetime. We shared a very large room and we invited an ex-colleague of ours, David Garlick, who was attending the congress but had nowhere to stay, to join us as there was plenty of room for a third bed. At this congress, for reasons I still do not understand, Morris gave 8 papers and I gave 5 on the work we were doing in Canberra. Between us we had hundreds of slides and every night until the late hours, the bench in our room would be littered with slides as we made final decisions on which ones to use for the next day’s papers. Then halfway through the congress, we had a day of rest. Morris decided to walk into Miami City from the Fontainebleau at Miami Beach. His route took him across a bridge on which pedestrians were not allowed. Cars were speeding in both directions as he clung to the side of the bridge, and when he was halfway across the Police Patrol picked him up. When he was about to be taken to the lock-up, he began to worry, not because he would be incarcerated, but because he would be unable to present the remainder of his papers. Fortunately, he was able to talk himself out of this predicament and he returned to the Fontainebleau, not on foot, but in a Police car.

Morris’ experiments on cell migration in immunity led to his beautiful experiments on the fetus in which he studied the development of the immune system as the fetus develops in utero. He followed these experiments with the successful transplantation of fertilized ova into the uterus of cattle, a forerunner to the human in vitro fertilization program in Australia.

During his career in Canberra, Morris nurtured a large number of PhD students, Postdoctoral, and Visiting Fellows, all attracted by his pioneering studies on the functions of the lymphatic system in the merino sheep. These scientists came not only from other parts of Australia but also from many other countries around the world. He did not suffer fools gladly and demanded from these colleagues the same rigorous standards to which he, himself, adhered.

During his career Morris often held strong views on many subjects, in veterinary fields as well as in those areas of human medicine in which he was involved. For example, he was opposed to human organ transplantation which he regarded as a form of cannibalism, and he strongly opposed, on ethical and moral grounds, the use of human fetuses for experimental purposes. He also held strong views on research in universities, strongly opposing the policies of governments which demand more relevance to practical issues in research which might lead to a cash benefit.

Besides his work in the laboratory, he also owned a Charolais Stud of which he was proud. But above all, he was a family man deeply devoted to his wife, Margaret (who was injured in the accident), his five children and his three grandchildren. As a host in his home or as an after-dinner speaker at conferences, he was a delightful raconteur with a wide range of stories to suit every occasion. When he was in one of his most impish moods, he would glance towards me with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes to see whether the "old boy" approved or was shocked.

Morris enjoyed life to the full whether in the laboratory, or his farm, with his family, or on social occasions. It has been one of my great pleasures over many years to watch the development of the brilliant career of a man whom I had the privilege of introducing to research—a career that has been
tragedically cut short by a road accident.
I am sure that all lymphologists will be
saddened by the thought that Bede
Morris will no longer be demonstrating
his exquisite experiments on the lym-
phatic system of the sheep.

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Bede's seminal contributions in this
young discipline [of lymphology] have
changed the course of investigations world-
wide bearing on the physiology of the
microcirculation, the "pumping" action of
lymphatic vessels, migrant streams of
immunocompetent cells, mechanisms of
immunologic tolerance and transplant rejec-
tion, and most recently the ontogeny of the
fetal immune system. His research efforts
have not only influenced the direction of
these fields by providing fresh concepts
and innovative techniques but their full
implications in human medicine, animal
husbandry, and biotechnology have yet to
be realized on an international level. His
conceptual advances and technical contribu-
tions have spawned preeminent satellite
laboratories throughout the world patterned
after his own, and many young and older
investigators have drawn strength and in-
spiration to persevere in uncharted terri-
tory because of his leadership, encour-
agement, and critical intellect.

Marlys H. Witte, M.D.
ISL Secretary-General

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[Letter to Bede's many friends and
colleagues at the Department of Immu-
nology] My respect and admiration of this
man have no bounds (I cry now...). He
just exemplified the man I wished to be—
so true, so strong, so fond of what he
loved. And he gave so much to me. So
much inspiration, so much enthusiasm, so
much wonder for the world that was and
what we could imagine. Bede was the ulti-
mate dreamer. He saw things as they could
be, not simply as they were. He laughed
so hard, perhaps out of vigor, or amuse-
ment, but more because the vagaries and
ironies of life intrigued him so; and he
delighted in the paradoxical, the unusual,
and what others would write off as "chaos".
Bede tried to make sense of the chaos, and
I think derived his greatest admiration for
nature from its most profound mysteries. I
recall Bede now, sitting at a table in the
John Curtin social room on a Friday after-
noon (so many fond memories for me of
these times) and he was commenting on
his arriving at age 60. Something to the
effect of "60's not so bad, but I don't
know about this dying thing...." Bede
stated. It just exemplified his profound
amazement at what life was, his profound
enjoyment of it as it was for him, and his
ultimate fear which was the finality of his
thoughts and projects (which now we must
carry on in some way as he would have
dreamed and wanted).

As you must all feel in some way, I
am indebted to Bede Morris. He gave a
tall, ungainly medical student from Arizona
one of the best years of his life—a year
that was as typical of Bede as perhaps
any...and a year that was undoubtedly
the best of my life as well.

Preserve his letters, his books, his
favorite (favourite) photos. They are what
we shall draw inspiration from in the
future. For there is one thing for sure...he
could dream up ideas faster than a whole
department could see them through, faster
than we ourselves could sometimes envision
them. He made everything ordinary, spec-
tacular.

[Letter to a medical school class-
mate] As you might expect, the thoughts
of him are heavy on my mind. I can
think of no other person who had such a
profound and dramatic impact on my life
in recent years. He of all people I emu-
lated and enjoyed. A truly brilliant and
passionately opinioned mind. One who
attempted everything and mastered many.
Articulate, humorous, and a leader beyond
compars. He inspired us with his own
enthusiasm and raw energy. An originator
of ideas, a passionate pursuer of knowl-
dge, a critic of boundless and often "poo-
pooed" skepticism—he was (and will be)
often proved right. I was also in admira-
tion of his own self-humility and sense of
profound guardianship for the things,
people and places (including Australia)
which he loved. He was boldly confiden,t
proud of his accomplishments, but a man
who eschewed vacant compliments and
honorary moneys (for lectures, etc.). He did
what he did, for the sheer love of it,
nothing else...and believed deeply that the
only true reason to pursue science was for
the love of it. Not for fame, money, or
dogmatic buttressing of preconceived ideas.
Bede will be sorely missed and long re-
membered. The timeliness of my year spent
down under now seems so poignant and so
irreplaceable.

Michael Dugan, M.D.
Bede's 1986 Student Fellow

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He loved to do an experiment and he always did it painstakingly with the critical eye of a perfectionist. While recent years saw him less at the bench, he was often in the operating theatre and in the Animal House, where his surgical skill, combined with a special indefinable affinity for the animal and the experiment could make the impossible work and a disaster become a triumph.

There is so much more that could be said about this man of so many parts, the sage, the aesthete, the recipient of international awards, the gardener, the farmer, the veterinarian, the oenophile with knowledge and palate and cellar envied by all, but always and perhaps most important was the family man. Bede constantly praised his good fortune in having married Margaret and fathered Simon, Sally, Jennifer, Scott, and Danielle. He was overjoyed with the arrival of his first three grandchildren, Benjamin, Stephanie, and Hannah. We who were privileged to enjoy the camaraderie of working long hours with him, and to participate in his thrill when seeing effort rewarded, appreciate and share their terrible loss and extend to them our deepest sympathy.

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[From The Age (Melbourne)] “Bede Morris was widely known for his work on the physiology of the immune system and, together with Dr. Joe Hall, started one whole branch of immunology. He was a true and courageous iconoclast who defended his unconventional viewpoints with courage and integrity. He was in many ways a barb under the saddle, with definite unconventional viewpoints, but always someone worth listening to,” said Sir Gustav Nossal, Director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

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