May 2013 sees the celebration of the 80th Birthday of Lionel Opie, Founder of the Journal of Molecular and Cellular Cardiology

1. Introduction

On the 3rd May 2013, the Hatter Institute for Cardiovascular Research, University of Cape Town, South Africa, will host a meeting to celebrate the 80th Birthday of its former Director, Professor Lionel Opie, a giant of the experimental cardiology world who has devoted more than 55 years to researching the energy metabolism of the heart. Besides an impressive track record of publications (over 540 articles published in scientific journals, 46 books and monographs and 159 chapters in books), Lionel Opie has received many prestigious awards, including the Order of Mapungubwe (Silver), bestowed by the South African President for his contribution to cardiology, and the Lorenzini Gold Medal of the International Society for Heart Research. Most importantly, together with Richard Bing, Lionel Opie is the Father of the Journal of Molecular Cellular Cardiology (the Yellow Journal), and he has played a major role in the establishment of the European Section of the International Society for Heart Research (Fig. 1).

2. 1970, the Yellow Journal was born

In 1969, from London and on vacation in South Africa, Opie visited Prof Amanda Lochner at the University of Stellenbosch and met Eors Bajusz (1926–1973) a farsighted Hungarian from the USA, also visiting. In between experiments, brainstorming discussions on cardiac metabolism led to Bajusz convincing Opie that a new cardiovascular research journal, focussing mainly on cardiac metabolism and cardiac molecular studies, was needed as conventional journals were dominated by haemodynamic concerns. Opie rushed back to London (he was a Consultant in Medicine, Royal Postgraduate School of Medicine, London), and contacted Richard Bing whose pioneering articles on human heart metabolism had caught Opie’s attention. Together, they managed to appoint a prestigious Editorial Board which included eminent figures such as the Nobel Prize winner Sir Hans Krebs (with whom Opie had worked as a Research Fellow), Eors Bajusz, Arnold Schwartz, Eugene Braunwald, Arnold Katz, Robert Berne, George Rona, Winifred Nayler, Peter Harris and Ed Sonnenblick.

Never forget the lady who does it all: Carol, Lionel Opie’s wife, assisted in naming the journal, the cover and dealt with all the administrative aspects, so that the first issue of the Journal of Molecular and Cellular Cardiology (JMCC) was published with Academic Press in March 1970. In the introductory Editorial, Richard Bing described the journal as being devoted to fundamental problems of cardiology. He captured the intensity, joy and sorrows of research by concluding “like hunting, scientific investigation is adventure. May the new journal reflect this spirit”. Opie’s introductory Editorial was on The Glucose Hypothesis, focussing on the still current concept that glucose-glycolysis is protective and excess free fatty acids (FFA) are bad during myocardial ischemia.

3. 1970, the first meeting of the European Section of the International Society for Heart research

The creation of JMCC in 1970 was closely linked with what Lionel Opie remembers as the first meeting of what would become the European Section of the ISHR in London. Initially called the European Section of the International Study Group for Research in Heart Metabolism, official recognition of the entity was made at the Group meeting in Paris in 1972, as proposed by Pierre Hatt. The resolution stipulated that the
Members of the study group would consist of all those who attended the last two meetings (London, 1970, Geneva, 1971). For new members, preference was given to young research workers actively engaged in the field of heart metabolism (for more details on the creation of the European section of the ISHR, refer to Heart and News, 2005, 13: 3).

Deeply involved in the creation of this new Society, Lionel Opie convened the European Section of the Editorial Board of the JMCC at every meeting of the Society since 1971, thereby fostering a strong European interest in the Journal. In 1986, Opie as sole Editor (Bing had already stepped down) handed over ownership of the Journal to the International Society for Heart Research to become its official journal. Lionel Opie says that by donating the Journal to the Society, he was simply promoting the on-going growth of molecular and cellular cardiology.

4. Yesterday, today, tomorrow

At the time of the creation of the JMCC, the process of publication was a fastidious and long process, taking more than 6 months. Today, an article can be widely disseminated only a few days after submission and/or acceptance. In Opie’s opinion, the modern technology brings the advantage of rapid knowledge in a specialized field of research but, being constantly stunned by new information, presents the risk of inhibiting one’s creativity. The vast variety of information received daily cannot be assimilated and often limits deeper thinking.

5. To young researchers

You are very good at obtaining new information, but Opie notes that you are often unable to write simple and correct English. His advice is that, if you feel like following his path, read (don’t skip through) the best articles in the hard copies of JMCC and other top journals to expand your general research knowledge and, in your free time, read good English novels and science books to broaden your education and improve your English writing skills!

6. To his collaborators

Although turning 80, Opie still devotes 100% of his time to research. “Work is fun and fun is work” said Krebs. Opie says that collaborators give the excitement and the criticism with special mention of Carl Apstein, William Coetzee, Faadiel Essop, Chris Hamm, Sandrine Lecour, Amanda Lochner, Willem Lubbe, Cecile Muller, Timothy Noakes, Patricia Owen, Michael Sack, Karen Sliwa (current Director of the Hatter Institute) and Derek Yellon.

Lionel, on behalf of all Members of the ISHR and the Editorial Board of the JMCC, we thank you for the invaluable legacy that you have left to the current, and future, generation of cardiovascular researchers. We wish you a happy birthday and on the 3rd of May, we will stick to your red wine hypothesis by enjoying a glass of red wine and raising a toast in your honour!

Sandrine Lecour, President of the South African Society for Cardiovascular Research.

Peter Ferdinandy, President of the ISHR European Section.

David Eisner (Lionel’s 4th successor as Editor of the JMCC).

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