

Reflections

Do it now

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I recently received news that one of my mentors, Dr. Antonie Blackler, had passed away at 88-years-old. I was touched that his wife reached out personally to tell me, as it had been more than 35 years since I worked with him as an undergraduate student at Cornell University. We had kept in touch over the years and he was fairly up to date on the lives and accomplishments of my children. Dr. Blackler was not a physician, but was a zoologist and geneticist who had a profound influence on my life path.

When I answered his wife's e-mail to express my condolences, I told her how much of an influence he had on my studies and my career. I worked with Dr. Blackler on researching the "2 nu" mutation in *Xenopus laevis*, a sex linked trait that caused the presence of 2 nucleoli per cell. My mother was amazed that her daughter, who until leaving for college would yell for her father to kill a spider, was now able to pick up and handle frogs, inject them with hormones, and express their eggs for review under the microscope.

Dr. Blackler taught me protocols and procedures, and how to think and analyze. He gave me a puzzle to unravel: dealing with the fact that in *Xenopus*, it is the male who is homozygous for sex chromosomes (ZZ) while the female is heterozygous (ZW). This was a task I put off for weeks, dealing with the usual undergraduate work load of papers, exams, and reading. When I had the time to devote to the pure exercise of intellectual consideration of his question, the results were fascinating and spurred many more theories and questions.

I told his widow how much I had loved her husband's British (and quite dry) sense of humor. I told her that when I visited Cornell after my medical school graduation I made sure to visit Dr. Blackler in his lab. As he took my updated contact information, with a new "MD" after my name, he told me that not all MDs stood for medical doctor; that the initials in fact, could indicate that the bearer was "mentally deranged."

His wife responded telling me that she too enjoyed his sense of humor and asked me to send any other special anecdotes, as "his kids didn't really know this part of his life."

It occurred to me that too often such wonderful memories and stories are shared years later with the family, rather than with the individual who inspired them. How wonderful a gift would it be for the person with whom you created those memories to relive them again and realize the difference they have made in someone's life? Do it now!

I am confident that everyone who made it through college, medical school, internship, residency, and perhaps fellowship can identify a few very special individuals who helped shape their journey. Think of someone who inspired, impressed, influenced, challenged, or changed you. Do it now!

Take some time to write down those memories and thank the person who created them. Thank the man or woman who helped create the person and physician you have become. An actual card or letter (handwritten, if possible, and legible) rather than an E-mail may become a treasured keepsake for your mentor, and eventually for the family they leave behind. Do it now!

Each letter that is written will make someone's life so much better knowing that their contribution has been appreciated. And, for me, each letter would be a perfect and fitting tribute to Dr. Blackler. Do it now!

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