

Remembering Werner Franke

The sad news on Werner's death and the deep feeling of loss of a close and dear friend, took me back to our first meetings, some 42-43 years ago. I was, at the time, just starting my scientific career as an independent researcher at the Weizmann Institute, while Werner was already a well known and clear leader in the international cell biology community, yet I recall that after only a few discussions, we have generated together a long list of common scientific interests – and a firm collaboration was planned, even before I got my own lab settled in Israel. I was deeply impressed and fascinated by Werner's personality, and wide horizons, and felt very fortunate that he was interested in launching a rather broad collaboration with us.

This was the beginning of a long partnership, that certainly had a huge impact on my scientific career, and more importantly, on my scientific development and maturation, that were clearly inspired by Werner, who acted as my "scientific big brother". The extensive and close collaboration that we established during the 1980s and 1990s, addressing a broad spectrum of topics associated with cell adhesion and intermediate filament biology, provided me and my group members with a unique and frequent opportunity to visit the lab at the DKFZ and watch Werner "in action", in his large and very active laboratory.

One of the rather rare and amazing inherent features of Werner's work was his capacity to clearly "see the forest for the trees". On the one hand he practiced "scientific perfectionism", devoting utmost and full attention to the finest details of the work, and yet, he never forgot the "big picture", namely the underlying biological question that is being investigated, complex as it may be. Moreover, Werner's capability to freely and naturally navigate between scales and research modalities: biochemistry- light microscopy- electron microscopy and whole organism level was truly amazing. Another landmark of his strategy and attitude to research was always based on working at the technological cutting edge, which is available at the time, no matter how demanding it is. Yet another non trivial principle that Werner followed was his sense of absolute personal responsibility to all the results, obtained by all his group members. This may sound natural, yet, it is a highly demanding and challenging undertaking, especially when one is running a relatively large laboratory, as Werner did.

Another aspect of working with Werner, which rendered our collaboration stable, productive and very pleasant was the fact that it was based on a genuine personal friendship between Werner and me, and by our respective group members. Through the endless conversations we had over the years I sensed that Werner's unique capacity, to be precise, deep and comprehensive, at the same time, was not applied to science only, but it touched essentially all "avenues of life" – from inter-personal relationships, to research group management, to the culture of running a research institute, to political leadership, to human rights and responsibility, to German and Israeli history (past and current), to the future of the middle East, to "church and state and (of course) discussions in real time on topics that got a wide public exposure, such as the Herbert von Karajan article and the doping of athletes practice in the former DDR. In all those Werner participated with the same passion, witness, determination, wisdom and usually, good humor.

Let me end with Shakespeare, who wrote: "*Praising what is lost, makes the remembrance dear*", and Werner, indeed left behind him dear memories that will live with his family and friends.

Selly and I send our sincere and heartfelt condolences to Brigitte, Friederike and Ulrich.

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