



International Society for Enzymology (ISE)

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Editor: David M. Goldberg

IN MEMORIAM ERICH KAISER

Erich Kaiser, Professor of Medical Chemistry and Honorary Senator of the University of Vienna, and founder of the Austrian proficiency testing program passed away on April 10th, 2005.

Born in Graz, Austria, on November 13th, 1925, he graduated from the famous Piaristen-Gymnasium in Vienna in 1943, subsequently studied medicine at the University of Vienna, and obtained his medical degree in 1949. Immediately after graduation he took a part-time position at the Institute of Medical Chemistry. Within the first five years in this position he published 24 scientific articles. In 1958 Erich Kaiser received the "venia legendi" on the basis of his research on "activation of serum proteases by antigen-antibody reactions". In 1966 he was awarded the title "University Professor". From 1972 to 1973 he was associate professor for Clinical Biochemistry. In 1973 he was appointed full professor of Medical Chemistry and head of the Institute of Medical Chemistry, University of Vienna. He served in this function for 23 years until his retirement on September 30th, 1996.

As a dedicated academic teacher he was highly valued by both students and colleagues. Besides teaching medical students in Medical Biochemistry and Clinical Biochemistry, he provided post-graduate training for a number of medical trainees in Laboratory Diagnostics. Most of them went on to become distinguished academic researchers or obtained positions as head of clinical institutes or diagnostic laboratories.

In addition to research and teaching, he maintained a strong focus on medical diagnostics, with special emphasis on laboratory medicine. Within his Institute he therefore established a diagnostic laboratory for specialised tests, beyond the scope of the routine clinical laboratory. It served primarily the University Clinics and the major hospitals in and around Vienna

His activities and interest in Laboratory Diagnostics resulted in the foundation of several professional organisations in Austria. Together with Professor

Theodor Leipert, then professor of Medical Chemistry, University of Graz, he founded the Austrian Society of Clinical Chemistry (ÖGKC) in 1969. Erich Kaiser's presidency of this society culminated in the organisation of the International IFCC Congress of Clinical Chemistry held in Vienna in 1981. For a long period of time this congress remained in the memory of the participants, due to the high standards of the scientific sessions and the social program.

Long before quality management and assurance became widely accepted, Erich Kaiser realised their importance for the performance of diagnostic laboratories. Therefore he initiated external quality assurance programmes as a research activity within





his institute, which were later continued in collaboration with the ÖGKC. These programs developed rapidly and were soon extended from clinical chemistry to haematology, coagulation testing, and microbiology. In 1980 it became obvious that the expanding role of Quality Assurance needed an independent organisation. Thus the Austrian Society for Quality Assurance and Standardisation of medical diagnostic tests (ÖQUASTA) was founded upon his initiative. He served as president of ÖQUASTA from 1980 to 2004. During his presidency Erich Kaiser continuously worked on broadening the scope of the various proficiency testing programs with which he was associated, and contributed enormously to their development of new procedures.

This year he would have celebrated his 80th birthday and the 25th anniversary of ÖQUASTA, his intellectual child. However, destiny has deprived us of the opportunity to celebrate these events with him. All who knew him personally will keep him in mind as a generous and kind person with a subtle sense of humour and a great universal knowledge in the best sense of the humanistic tradition. We will miss him as a friend and mentor.

Martin Kraupp

Mathias M. Müller

Erich Kaiser and the Birth of ISCE: A Personal Memoir

I first met Erich in Italy, and I was to meet him many times again in that country that we both loved so much. The occasion was the 5th International Symposium on Clinical Enzymology, held in Venice in the fall of 1973. Its organizer was Angelo Burlina who at the time was director of a regional laboratory in the small North Italian town of Conegliano; before him, it had been famous only for its great Renaissance painter Cima and its delicious champagne-like Prosecco. Angelo was the first to put it on the scientific map by organizing the first Symposium on Clinical Enzymology ever held in the entire universe several years earlier. He was not the kind of individual to start off in a small way and try to get bigger; his style was to start big and then enlarge, although in his personal demeanor nobody could have been more modest or self-effacing. So the event began grandiosely as the First International Symposium on Clinical Enzymology. Two flags, in addition to that of Italy, flew over the tiny auditorium: those of Germany and Kenya. The first

recognized the presence of the doyen of Clinical Enzymology: Hans-Ulrich Bergmeyer, Director of Research at Boehringer Mannheim who were covering the largest share of the costs of the Symposium. The second was a graduate student from Nairobi whose thesis supervisor and Angelo's life-long amanuensis was that fine scientist and gentleman, Lauro Galzigna, who had just returned from a year's leave of absence from the University of Padua to start Kenya's first Program in Clinical Chemistry.

By the time the 5th International Symposium fell due, the series had attracted such interest from medical scientists in Italy and the rest of Europe that Conegliano had run out of beds; most of the guests and registrants would have had to sleep in tents erected in the vineyards. So, Angelo moved the Symposium to nearby Venice, taking over most of the 5-star Danieli Hotel on the mainland, and the entire island of San Giorgio Maggiore with its

magnificent Cini Foundation, a short vaporetto-ride across the lagoon. Nowadays, Clinical Enzymology considers itself fortunate if a half-day session at some broader scientific conference is devoted to its cause; a full day is a rare luxury. But way back in 1973, a large body of registrants and more than 40 invited speakers representing the cream of European laboratory physicians and scientists made the return journey between the Danieli Hotel and the Cini Foundation for three- and-a half days, listening to and talking about nothing else but Clinical Enzymology; for in those days Clinical Enzymology **was** the very cream of Laboratory Medicine. Naturally, Erich Kaiser as one of the most distinguished laboratorians of the German-speaking world who could communicate almost as well in that unspeakable language that we call *English* was one of the plenary lecturers. I was appearing in that capacity also, but for the first time in my career. In light of the fact that my invitation arrived only 4 weeks before the Symposium, I assumed that I was a late substitute, but that interpretation has been challenged by subsequent experience. On at least 20 occasions I have been invited to speak at scientific meetings in Italy, and never once has my final invitation arrived earlier than 4 weeks before the event.

I saw a lot of Erich at that meeting, for Angelo Burlina, who had just started the first (and unfortunately the only) National Society of Clinical Enzymology in Italy the previous year had conceived the notion of going one better and establishing a European Society of Clinical Enzymology. I was one of about thirteen colleagues that he conscripted to help him in that task; Erich Kaiser was another. We met at working lunches and at various informal sessions prior to or after the evening social events to hammer out a document that subsequently became known as the *Danieli Declaration* setting out the prospectus and the Constitution of the proposed Society. On the final night, a Saturday, we tried to finish the document before the start of a special concert being given in honour of the Symposium by the Orchestra of La Fenice under the baton of the distinguished Austrian conductor Karl Bohm. We failed, but came close. It was agreed that Lauro Galzigna and I would stay behind at the Danieli and attempt to put the final touches to the document, and that if we were successful, we could bring it to the champagne reception that would follow the termination of the concert at Teatro La Fenice. With the other eleven out of the way, Lauro and I made steady progress. We were able to complete the task ahead of schedule, and we reached the theatre at the interval with copies of the document that we handed out and beseeched the recipients to read before the

lights went down for the second-half of the concert. We emphasized the urgency because there was only a single composition comprising 45-minutes of music played without a break, but so symbolically appropriate for the occasion: Richard Strauss's autobiographical tone-poem *Ein Heldenleben* (*A Hero's Life*). That night, after the final note had been played and the enthusiastic applause had died away, we gathered in the foyer, we signed the document, we drank Champagne (or maybe it was a very good Prosecco) and we too felt like heros. After all, we had just founded the European Society of Clinical Enzymology. So we thought. But we were wrong.

A major concern was the attitude of the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry (IFCC): how would this all-powerful body react to the attempt to establish a new and independent organization devoted to a single branch of the subject, and the most productive and progressive branch of all at the time? The predictions were dire. We would be seen as competing upstarts. IFCC would never agree, and without its support we were doomed. Its opposition would make it impossible to attract the industrial largesse required to get the Society off the ground and sustain its future activities. Most of the signatories were loyal members of IFCC and sat on its Council or its various committees. The prophets looked into the crystal ball and saw a stillbirth staring them in the face. There was only one way of finding out. Someone had to go and visit Martin Rubin, its all-powerful American President who virtually ruled the Federation like an old-style monarch. Angelo was the obvious person but there was a major obstacle: his English discourse was conducted in a series of monosyllables and sign language (and it did n't improve much over his remaining years), although he could articulate clearly and confidently from the podium the elegant phrases out of which Lauro Galzigna fashioned their joint papers. I can only guess why I was requested to go in his place: I was the youngest member of the group and I had no reputation or position worth losing in the event of incurring the monarch's wrath. It is a common strategy always to send the youngest lamb to the slaughter !

The opportunity of meeting Martin Rubin arose at a European Congress of Clinical Chemistry in Munich early the next year. I found him to be utterly charming and intelligent, but he was totally against the creation of the European Society of Clinical Enzymology. There was no European Federation of Clinical Chemistry, and the meeting that we were both attending had been organized by IFCC in collaboration with the National Society of the host

nation, Germany. In his charm and in his antipathy to European hegemony, Rubin was the blueprint for another American President, George W Bush. But there was one fundamental difference: he was a devoted internationalist. "Why not establish the International Society of Enzymology?" he asked. It was a question that I put to the other members of the Foundation Committee into which the Danieli Group had morphed when we met again at the same hotel for the 6th International Symposium on Clinical Enzymology in 1974. The response was a relieved and resounding affirmative, and in gratitude we made IFCC the constitutional beneficiary of any surviving funds in the event of the Society's demise. No one was more relieved than I, for a few months earlier I had accepted an offer to move from my then current position in Sheffield, England to Toronto, Canada . I would no longer be a "European ".

The business of nominating a Board then began. The choice of President naturally fell on Angelo Burlina. To our astonishment, he declined and suggested instead the name of John Henry Wilkinson whom he proceeded to parachute into the Presidency. In truth , Wilkinson was at the time the most prominent clinical enzymologist around, having authored the earliest textbooks on enzymes and isoenzymes, and edited a recent major expansion of the former. But he had played no role whatever in the discussions and manoeuvres leading up to the establishment of the Society. An Englishman by birth and training, he had moved back across the Atlantic from the Pepper Laboratories of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia to fill the newly created Chair of Chemical Pathology at London's Charing Cross Hospital Medical School. Angelo was adamant, and expressed his satisfaction in becoming the first Vice-President of the Society. I knew and respected both men, but I am in no doubt that Angelo had the greater intellect and energy, and had a messianic vision for the Society that set him apart. At Wilkinson's premature death just before completing his 4-year term, Angelo would become Acting President and go on to win a full term as President in his own right, although not without a fight. Two other members of the Board stood against him, citing his lack of English as a reason why he should not be elected, but he deservedly won in a landslide. Paradoxically, neither of his competitors spoke Italian, and John Henry Wilkinson spoke no other language but English. The Bible informs us that all humanity spoke the same language up to the day it attempted to build the Tower of Babel in order to reach heaven; as a punishment God created the diverse languages that mankind now employs so that they would not be able to communicate on such joint international initiatives

in the future. But later He seems to have regretted this action, and He created the British Empire in an attempt to undo the damage and restore to His people a common tongue.

Erich Kaiser had no such problem. He spoke the language of Shakespeare and the Beatles with fluency, albeit with a heavy teutonic intonation that was occasionally lightened by a touch of Viennes café humour. He was appointed Treasurer, and in that capacity he received large sums of money over the next four years, but in all that time he never wrote a single cheque. The task of disbursing the funds of the Society fell to its Secretary, Marc Roth, who lived and worked in Geneva where its account was held in Swiss Francs at the main branch of the Union Bank of Switzerland. So Erich's responsibilities as Treasurer were few, but he provided the Board with wise counsel and the Society with one of its finest hours when he persuaded his colleague Hans-Jorge Gibitz of Salzburg to organize an International Congress of Clinical Enzymology in Mozart's birthplace as a 3-day satellite meeting after the conclusion of the IFCC Congress in Vienna in 1981 for which he (Erich) held the major responsibility as its President.

Two further appointments as Councilor (Board Member without portfolio) completed that first administrative committee: myself, and Gabor Szasz from the University of Giessen in Germany. Lauro Galzigna was soon added as an *ex – officio* non-voting member, ostensibly to serve as Angelo's interpreter, but moreso because of his own admirable qualities, as well as the fact that the Constitution specified a place for the Ex – President which, by definition could not be filled in that initial 4-year term . Nor, with Henry Wilkinson's premature death, could it be filled in the following 4-year term during which Angelo was President and I became Vice-President . In fact, although Angelo had turned down the opportunity of becoming the first President of the Society, fate saw to it that he was rewarded by becoming its first living ex- President. Lauro Galzigna took my place as a full voting member; Erich Kaiser continued to receive funds in whatever currency on behalf of the Society as its Treasurer, and Marc Roth continued to write cheques in Swiss Francs as its Secretary as well as performing the other tasks expected of that Office. Gabor Szasz survived little more than a year into his second term as Councilor, succumbing to a malignant melanoma that advanced with frightening rapidity. He was replaced by Donald Moss from London's Postgraduate Medical Centre at Hammersmith Hospital, John Henry Wilkinson's successor as the

leading figure among Clinical Enzymologists in the English-speaking world, who brought his Socratic wisdom and Churchillian wit to the service of the Society and went on to become its third President.

During these years, I saw a great deal of Erich at a string of International Congresses of Clinical Enzymology that took place at least once a year in several of the world's finest cities: London (UK), Jerusalem, Madrid (El Escorial), San Diego, Washington DC and Toronto, but it was always in Italy (whether as a full-scale *International Congress* or a mere *International Symposium*) that our happiest reunions took place. I recall several such events in Venice, our birthplace, as well as in Rome, Verona, Abbano Terme, and Padua (Montegrotto), all of them organized by Angelo Burlina with no expense spared. We never again resided at the Danieli Hotel, but on three occasions we stayed at the Lido, twice at the Excelsior Hotel and once at the Grand Hotel des Bains, the last coinciding with the release of Luchino Visconti's great cinematic achievement *Death in Venice* for which it provided the setting. At one such Congress in Venice marking the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Society, we both (together with three other surviving signatories of the *Danieli Declaration*) received an award designated LION OF VENICE for "Services to International Enzymology", or so the plaque states. I have never discovered whether anyone of true distinction – an author, a film star, a prominent philanthropist, a Nobel Prize-winner or even a politician – ever received this award before or since, and I suspect that it was a product of Angelo Burlina's fertile imagination. On the evening after the ceremony, I was dining with Erich and discussed with him who our antecedents might be. I mentioned that the only other "Lion of Venice" known to me was Otello and reminded him of the scene from Giuseppe Verdi's opera where the hero falls down unconscious in a fit of jealousy and the evil Iago plants his foot on his chest shouting triumphantly: "*Ecce Il Leone!*" (*Behold the Lion!*) in light of which I was not sure whether the award was supposed to be a blessing or a curse. "It could be worse", said Erich, smiling gently. "After all, look what happened to Iago! At least Otello left behind him a better reputation".

Wherever he traveled in Continental Europe, Erich Kaiser always went by train bringing his beloved wife Christa with him. She hated airplanes and refused to fly so that he was forced to travel alone if a flight was involved. They were a close and affectionate couple who had no children, but it would not be strictly accurate to say that they only lived for

each other: they lived for the greater good of humanity as a whole. He spoke fondly of his sister and her only son, his nephew, both of them physicians, but I am not aware of any other close relatives. For many years he was served with devotion by his friendly and efficient administrator, Mrs Elisabeth Legenstein, and he always had an admiring cadre of young trainees and associates, as well as distinguished colleagues of his own generation most of whom predeceased him. He required all of these support mechanisms when Christa died quite suddenly at a relatively early age and well before his own retirement was due. Hard work brought him solace, and hard work was something to which he was accustomed. Each day he gave a one-hour lecture to approximately one-third of the class of 1,500 first year medical students, the responsibility for the remainder being shared by two other departments on an elective basis. This arrangement was imposed by the peculiar selection process employed in Austria to determine Medical School admission; in brief, there was no selection process at all. Any student graduating from High School can apply for such admission as a right, and if he holds the minimum qualifications the University *must* admit him. What then happened at the end of the first year was a veritable blood-bath. Only the top 300 of the class based on the end-of-year examinations were allowed to continue into the following and subsequent years; the rest had to take up taxi-driving.

No one else could deliver a lecture quite like Erich. His lectures had the formal structure of a Bach fugue, but they were delivered with the vocal power of a Wagner Opera. They had the texture and optical qualities of glycerol: utterly dense but completely transparent. They were loaded with gold, but you did not have to dig deep to find it, as in South Africa's Rand goldmines. It was there on the surface, as it is in the open-cast gold mines of Northern Ontario. Not for him the titillating power-point slides of the present day or their closest approximation in his own day. Every one of his slides looked as if it had come straight off the Gutenberg Press: long lists of information carefully printed out in black and white using a Gothic font. Knowledge was meticulously transferred with each press on the **Forward** button, and it worked well for his listeners.

In personal conversation this sense of massive weight was largely mitigated by the sparkle and brilliance of his eyes, which of course one could not see beyond the second row of a large lecture theatre. Face-to-face, he came across as a much lighter, almost Puckish personality, and he had a breadth of interests

that allowed him to contribute meaningfully to whatever topic happened to hold the floor, be it politics, history, philosophy, music or the visual arts. He was not just a good talker; he was also a good listener, and an astute observer. His interests went far beyond science and medicine and culture to embrace the very core of the human condition and the need for affirmative action to protect it from its self-imposed dangers. Typical of his lifelong concern for humanity was his devotion in the last years of his life to the cause of World Peace. I kept telling him that he was wasting his time and that the human race was never intended to be at peace for more than a few years at a stretch, but I could never get him to give up on his dream.

His temperament was characterized by patience, tolerance, and generosity. I have only once seen him lose his temper. It happened at the Lido during one of the Venice Meetings, when we both joined a few colleagues for what we thought would be a quiet informal dinner before the full scientific program got underway the following day. A few weeks earlier, Kurt Waldheim who had finished his term as Secretary-General of the United Nations amid allegations that he had served in an SS Unit during World War II had been elected President of Austria. This was more than Mario Werner, then Vice – President of the Society, could bear. Although born and educated in Zurich, he had moved to USA three decades earlier and was now based in Washington, DC. He waxed lyrical about the evils of Nazism, and its inventor, that little Austrian corporal who changed his name to Adolph Hitler. From there, it was only a small step to his henchman, the Austrian ex-Secretary General of UNO, and at most a further two or three steps to the collective guilt of the entire Austrian nation, including those of its number who at this very moment were sitting at the table enjoying a good plate of Italian pasta. I have never seen anyone more incensed than Erich. On many occasions during our friendship we had discussed these issues, and he always took an unforgiving view of the ease with which his countrymen had succumbed to its first encounter with German Fascism and the help it had given not only to the German war effort but also to its attempt to exterminate the Jewish People. But his pride had been touched to the quick, and the ire of his patriotism had been raised to boiling point. He took up the challenge, and within the space of a few minutes, the argument had left the realm of the English language and was being pursued with the utmost virulence in the lowest of Low German, well beyond the comprehension of any other member of the company. Soon, virulence turned to actual violence as Erich and Mario started to trade punches

across the table. By the time they had managed to knock over a good bottle of Amarone that we had all been looking forward to drinking, we determined that this nonsense had to stop. By a series of procedures that involved the use of neither English or German, we managed to frog-march them individually out of the restaurant through different doors and into the cool night air where exhaustion, if not reason, prevailed. Donald Moss returned to the restaurant to pay the bill, and we walked back to the Grand Hotel des Bains taking good care to keep the belligerents well apart. As I wished Erich good-night, he turned to me and said: "These Swiss! If they were so much against Hitler, why did they stay neutral?"

Erich was not a sporting man, either in word or in action. He never talked about soccer or skating or skiing, or any other sport in which one might have expected a good Austrian to be interested. Even when his compatriots Niki Lauda and Thomas Muster were respectively Grand Prix racing champion and (however briefly) World No 1 tennis player, I doubt that these facts entered his level of consciousness. He was, however, a prodigious walker, using his car and Vienna's public transport system as seldom as possible, and enjoying long strolls in the Tyrol during his cherished vacations at his chalet in Lienz. At meetings in Venice, he could walk the length of the Grand Canal in record speed, even stopping to check the prices of the menus of the various restaurants we passed *en route*; had it not been for these respites I would have been unable to keep up with him. Just before his 75th birthday celebration that I attended in Vienna, he visited me in Nice where I was spending a year of Sabbatical leave and reached the top of the two highest peaks of the nearby *Estoril Massif* ahead of me. When, about a month before his death, I phoned him and learned that he had been experiencing great difficulty in walking and had not left his apartment for several weeks, I guessed that something serious must be afoot. Art and culture were what interested him. His tiny apartment in Vienna was like a little jewel box, tastefully crammed with the two examples of human creativity in which its dimensions had forced him to specialize: antique clocks, and oriental kilims (those small rugs often used to soften the pain of sitting on a camel's hump) that adorned most of its walls. And of course he had a season-ticket for the Opera, the right to which he had inherited from his parents, and that he cherished to the point of renewing annually until well into his retirement, even if he intended to see only a minority of the performances, his friends and professional colleagues benefiting from the remainder.

Our friendship was sealed by mutual visits to our respective cities of residence. Erich came to Toronto on several occasions; once as a Visiting Professor in my Department; twice to participate in Scientific Congresses held in the city; and as part of a Canadian-wide lectureship that I had managed to arrange with colleagues in other academic centres of the frozen North on his behalf. In Toronto, he generally slept in my basement guest room and became for the duration of the visit a fully participating member of my family. Despite having no children of his own, he got on very well with my two young daughters for whom he used to bring those sparkling crystal animals for which the House of Swarovski is world-renowned. Every Christmas he would send me a book or calendar focusing on the work of a Viennese artist, Klimt and Schiele in particular being well represented, for he knew how much I loved the work of the Secessionists. For my wife there was always an accompanying gift of another art form for which Vienna is famous: a box of Mozart Chocolates. My visits to Vienna were just as numerous, although they were occasionally in the pursuit of pleasure rather than the cause of Science. The one – bedroom apartment with its clocks and kilims allowed no space for a visitor, and so I was accommodated conveniently and elegantly in the Old World comfort of the Hotel Regina within sight of Erich's University office. Tickets for the Opera and concerts at the Musikverein were routinely presented on arrival, and there were other pleasures. The first

time I was invited to a "heurigen" at Grinzing, a suburb of the city on the fringe of the famous Vienna Woods, Erich's pronunciation was such as to persuade me that the first syllable derived from the same root as the English word "whore" and that, Grinzing must therefore be the name of a brothel. Naturally, I accepted. On arrival, it became clear that the establishment was devoted to WINE and SONG, but not to WOMEN at all. Still, two out of the three members of that hedonistic trilogy for which the delightful Strauss waltz is named provided memorable entertainment, and I returned with Erich to Grinzing on several later occasions.

Erich Kaiser belongs together with a handful of other wonderful individuals whose acquaintance, and (ultimately) friendship, I owe to this Society. Everything started with the Society. We lived through its conception, its gestation, its birth and infancy, to its adolescence and maturity. Alas, the latter was short-lived, and it seems in retrospect that the International Society of Clinical Enzymology represents a severe case of institutional progeria. With Erich's passing, few of these friends remain, but their memories will endure. None more so than that of the gentle kindly professor from Vienna with whom I shared some of the greatest experiences in my career.

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