



IN MEMORIAM

DR. HAROLD “HAL” GAINER

I first met Hal in 1981, at the Brattleboro Rat meeting in Dartmouth, organised by Heinz Valtin. It was my first trip across the ocean, and I'd had an eventful 24-hour journey getting there: the coach from Boston dropped me off at a burger joint 5 miles away at 5 in the morning, and after many cups of coffee, a kind waitress persuaded one of the other customers to drop me off at the University. I arrived at my destination just as the registration desk was being set up. Hal was one of the first people I met that early morning – it turned out that we were lodged in neighbouring rooms, and as I'd brought a bottle of whisky and played pool badly we soon established common interests.



Hal was generous with his time and wisdom; he seemed to have no interest in reputations, which was just as well because I had none. This began a friendship that we revived the following year, when Hal gave a plenary lecture at Babraham, at a Conference on the Neurohypophysis (one of the precursors to WCNH), and it was continued at many, many meetings thereafter.

I knew even then that Hal was a pre-eminent biochemist and a pioneer of molecular biology, but I also knew him as an electrophysiologist and comparative physiologist. One of his earliest studies was on phasic firing in a neurone in *Aplysia* - and, in what I can only think of a mad experiment inspired by a remarkable leap of imagination, he showed that bath application of vasopressin would modify that patterning. This was long before any hint that vasopressin might have a homolog in *Aplysia*, long before vasopressin was understood to be a neuronal messenger, and long before any idea that peptides might be modulators of activity patterns. His account of those early days you can listen to for yourselves here (podcast#24 on <https://www.inf-neuroendocrinology.org/podcasts/>).

Hal was a constant source of gentle wisdom on all matters neurohypophysial; he was passionate about oxytocin and vasopressin throughout his life. When Covid interrupted normal life, we had a long and lively e-mail discussion in which we delved into the details of papers that we had published 30 years ago on the role of dynorphin in magnocellular neurones, to try to reconcile differences that few others would recognise as more than fine details. But Hal cared about rigor, integrity was critically important, and details mattered.

But I remember also his humanity and compassion; on 9/11 we were in Bordeaux at another WCNH meeting, and his quiet wisdom then was humbling.

We who knew him will miss him as no other.

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