

# Memories of Henri Begleiter

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**H**ENRI BEGLEITER WAS a premier-class scientist of international acclaim, as well as a premier-class citizen of the world. I am fortunate to have been a close friend and a research companion of Henri for more than 25 years. He was a leader in the nascent field of biomedical alcohol research in the 1970s, postulating alcoholism as a brain disorder. Trained as a physical biochemist working on liver enzymes of alcohol metabolism, I learned the potentials of this new area of research from the seminal book series *The Biology of Alcoholism*, edited by Kissin and Begleiter. Volume 1, published in 1971, focused on the biochemistry and Volume 2, published in 1972, the physiology and behavior underlying this common complex and stigmatizing disorder. Volume 3 (1974) addressed clinical pathology, and Volumes 4 and 5 (1976), the social aspects and the treatment and rehabilitation of the chronic alcoholic, respectively. Much later (1983), Volume 6, "The Pathogenesis of Alcoholism: Psychosocial Factors," and Volume 7, "The Pathogenesis of Alcoholism, Biological Factors," were published. In 1995–1996 a new series (Eds., Begleiter and Kissin) began: "Alcohol and Alcoholism," Volume 1, "The Genetics of Alcoholism," and Volume 2, "The Pharmacology of Alcohol and Alcohol Dependence." When asked about further volumes of the new series, Henri's response was that he had become too busy with a myriad of other demands on his time. Moreover, the field was already well under way as were the research on the genetic basis of alcoholism and the development of new pharmacological interventions based on new knowledge of the neurobiological actions of ethanol. This prediction has been borne out by the research advances in the past 10 years.

My first encounter with Henri was in the latter part of the 1970s at an international meeting of alcohol researchers at Chexbres, Switzerland. The focus of the meeting was the use of animal models to study the neurobiological basis of alcohol-seeking behavior, alcohol dependence, and withdrawal. Although we were born and brought up in different parts of the world, and worked in different disciplines, we shared in having been refugees of a World War,

and sought the freedom and opportunity to pursue research, teaching, and writing. To be truly effective, one must also embrace service functions in behalf of the research community at large. In these activities, Henri's leadership skills and constant insistence on high-quality science were critical for the field. He served untiringly in an advisory capacity to a fledgling NIAAA. He chaired the NIAAA Biomedical Initial Review Group (IRG) from 1986 to 1990 and the Neuroscience IRG from 1990 to 1994. Subsequently, he served as a member of the National Advisory Council to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) from 1997 to 2000.

Henri also passionately believed in fostering interdisciplinary and international research into the etiology, course and treatment of alcoholism. To this end, the birth of the Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA) and that of the International Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism (ISBRA) in the latter half of the 1970s was critical to the field. The annual and biennial meetings of these societies, then and now, speak volumes on the growth and maturation of alcohol research as an integrated multidisciplinary enterprise. Henri served in every possible leadership position in the RSA from 1978 through 1997 and was president in 1987 to 1989. Similarly, he served first as secretary and then as member of the Steering/Central Committee and the Board of Trustees of ISBRA from 1978 to 1989. He was a pillar of strength and stability to our research community.

Some leaders are born and some have leadership thrust upon them. Henri satisfied both conditions. He exuded vitality, warmth, and enthusiasm. He was balanced in knowing his own strengths and weaknesses as well as those around him. He had an infectious laughter and enjoyed hearing and telling jokes. There was a distinctive timbre to his voice that he modulated skillfully in expressions of affection, approval, challenge, and reproach. He was an outstanding speaker and lecturer, much sought after worldwide. His personality is better portrayed in pictures than words. Selected photographs (Figs. 1–6) taken over the years illustrate this point.

Henri's passion for science and teaching was surpassed only by his devotion to his family. He would not have been able to accomplish all he did without the loving and unconditional support of Esther, his loving spouse of 43 years. Henri was equally committed to Esther. They raised 2 children, Alison and David, now both medical doctors. Henri loved children and opined for grandchildren. This

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wish became a reality with the arrival of Daniel and Benjamin. In the last 2 years of failing health, they were a constant source of joy. Peels of laughter poured out from

him, as he showed them magic tricks, sitting with them on the living room floor. All of them will miss Henri even more so than we can imagine.



**Fig. 1.** Taking the search for alcoholism risk genes to the top of the Great Wall in China.



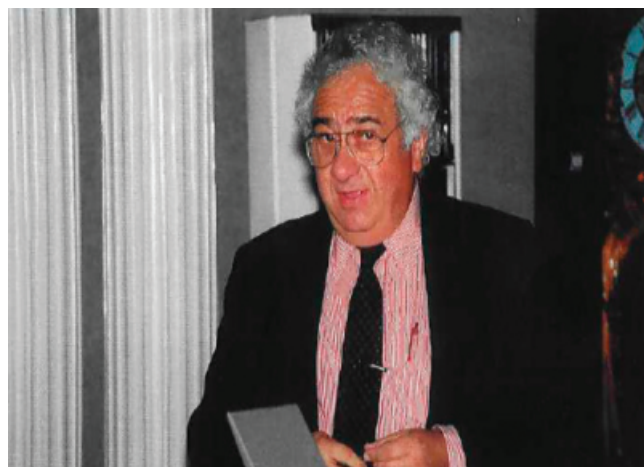
**Fig. 2.** Taking the search for alcoholism risk genes to the top of NIH.



**Fig. 3.** I like that joke.



**Fig. 4.** If you think the question is stupid, don't ask it.



**Fig. 5.** Be careful what you ask for.



**Fig. 6.** Esther and Henri at the reception when he received the Jellinek Award. The Tenth ISBRA Congress (Yokohama, Japan, 2000).