Autobiography Series: A Hitchhiker's Road to Neuropathology

Cedric S. Raine, PhD, DSc

Editors’ Introduction

The following reminiscence by Cedric Raine is the 10th autobiography in a series published in the Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology. These have been solicited from senior members of the neuropathology community who have been noted leaders and contributors to neuroscience and to the American Association of Neuropathologists (AANP) and have a historical perspective of the importance of neuropathology in diagnosis, education, and research. His is the first autobiography by a distinguished PhD member (as well as former president) of the AANP, highlighting the contributions and integral roles of basic neuroscientists in our Association. It is hoped that this series will entertain, enlighten, and present members of the AANP with a better sense of the legacy that we have inherited, as well as reintroduce our respected members as humans having interesting lives filled with adventures, joys, and sorrows, and allow them to present their lives in their own words.

MNH, RAS

"A man is the product of his thoughts. What he thinks he becomes."

Mahatma Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Lacking a more original arresting opening, let me begin by saying that to be invited to join the list of esteemed neuropathologists featured in the Journal’s Autobiography Series, following icons like Asao Hirano, Robert Terry, and Nicholas Gonatas, is both a privilege and a challenge. Never known for being conventional and sporting a background completely at odds with the standard training of most members of the American Association of Neuropathologists (AANP), I would like to take off on a different foot by thanking my colleagues in the Association for welcoming and accepting me, among the first PhDs, into the fold as an Active Member. When Mike Hart rang me a few months ago asking me to prepare a piece for the Series, my knee-jerk reaction was to decline on the grounds of juvenility and inappropriateness. Recognizing that autobiographies usually represent one’s own self-chosen, self-edited reminiscences, I was in no hurry to wax solipsistic to the readership and my colleagues. As we spoke, however, I rationalized the issue by recalling how many years had flown by since I became involved with the AANP (actually, 44) and how my own development as an investigator had paralleled and benefited from my affiliation with the Association and its mouthpiece, the Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology (JNEN). Setting feelings of uncertainty aside and with Mike still on the line, I thought, “this is the academic body that gave me the legs to stand on in neuropathology; of course, I’m qualified; I’ll do it.” So, for an autobiography garnished more with anecdotes than achievements, read on.

EARLY YEARS

I was born in May 1940 in Eastbourne, England, to a single mother; the vivid description of WWII events from her provided me with images difficult to distinguish from actual memories. She used to talk about the Dunkirk evacuation and the dogfights overhead between Spitfires, Hurricanes, and ME 109s, with their contrails slicing the summer sky, all occurring while I was in my push-chair. Moreover, this coastline was also the planned landing site for the German invasion barges waiting to depart Belgium, but thanks to the Royal Air Force and the Valiant Few, it never came to pass. Not surprisingly, Eastbourne residents were advised to evacuate to safer havens, particularly as German bombers driven from the London Blitz fled our airspace and jettisoned unspent bombs along the coast. My mother decided to return to her parents’ home in Carlisle, Cumberland, 400 miles north, 8 miles south of the Scottish border. We arrived in Carlisle in 1942, unannounced and definitely not welcome. Apparently, she had left Carlisle about 10 years earlier under a cloud and had not been heard of since. However, her odyssey had ended; her funds had run dry and she had come home. Aunt Maureen, who is 7 years older than me, answered the doorbell and found her sister who she had never seen, standing on the doorstep with “a beautiful little boy in a green woollen suit with small pink flowers across the front.” We were admitted into the house by my grandmother; my grandfather was summoned from his victory garden and there followed an unpleasant confrontation ending with my grandmother (my life’s best friend and savior), taking me by the hand out of the fray saying “I am going to put this young man through university,” and she did.

Shortly thereafter, real memories began to form. There were 4 sisters in the house; 3 of them rather like the ugly