



Alex Ungar

Our friend and colleague, Alex Ungar, died on May 11th aged 91. Alex's passion for pharmacology began during his medical studies at Oxford University and clinical work at University College Hospital, London. This was followed by teaching physiology at St Bartholomew's Hospital before finding his true home in pharmacology at the School of Pharmacy in London and then the Department of Pharmacology in Edinburgh University from 1969.

Alex organised the Pharmacology Honours course at 'The Square' at a time when practical work was a major part of honours courses. Bob Jones recalls watching a skilled surgeon at work as he demonstrated the classical heart-lung preparation, showing the stimulant action of adrenaline and the restorative action of digoxin as the heart began to fail. He was always an 'in-vivo man' and although one could sense he was unconvinced of the value of certain in-vitro pharmacological preparations, his criticism was always gentlemanly.

He accompanied Professor Eric Horton to the Edinburgh Medical School together with several of us, where he continued to run the Honours course in Pharmacology, which at that time had six science students and six medical students. He would often say that the master-apprentice arrangement is the most efficient and enjoyable way to communicate both knowledge and practical skill. A significant event in the academic year was a week-long expedition to the University's outward-bound school at Firbush Point on Loch Tay. The main rationale was the students' presentation of their dissertations. Other activities included trekking up Ben Lawers, dinghy-sailing on the loch (Alex was the preferred skipper as

certain of the junior staff were somewhat gung-ho and the water was only 6°C), and singing round the camp-fire of an evening (Alex's contributions were always witty and memorable).

Alex was a genial colleague and always willing to advise on research matters, particularly of a cardiovascular nature. He was also a caring ad-hoc GP to a number of staff members. Indeed, I remember asking him about the persistent malaise I suffered after a serious respiratory illness (c.f. long-Covid). I had been trying to get fit by running round the base of Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat over lunchtime, which only made matters worse. He asked me how many pubs lay within a mile or so of home – to which I replied - five. There you have it then – over the next couple of months take a brisk and varied evening walk every other day imbibing just a single pint of Belhaven Best – wise advice! Huge tomes of medical knowledge held no dread for Alex and his ability to collate and assess data was second to none. This knowledge was much used by Norgine, in the development of their new medicines, for whom he acted as a consultant for 50 years.

Mentoring students was a passion for Alex and I, Kathy Kane, benefitted from this both as an undergraduate and as a PhD student. His parties for Honours students were not to be missed, not only for the food and wine but the banter too. His PhD students benefitted from a standard of supervision that was beyond reproach (the master-apprentice approach that Bob referred to) together with lessons in intellectual rigour that shaped their future. Alex liked students and enjoyed listening to their views and, even better, sharing in their success when an experiment worked! His breadth of knowledge was exceptional and he was generous in sharing this. Being a student of his didn't end there. I fondly remember nibbling on salmon sandwiches and sipping champagne in a box at Covent Garden Opera House, travelling via Landrover, with his family, to Lake Garda before popping up to Prague to visit a life-long colleague and friend, Ladislava Sladka. A gap in Alex's education was identified, however, by myself and another of his PhD students, Julian Critchley. Alex had never seen a Bond film. This was rectified by a cinema visit to see the latest Bond film, *Live and Let Die*, which he loved. He became an avid fan of these films and was always keen to catch the latest one.

Alex showed his dedication to the Pharmacological Society by undertaking editorship of the *Journal* for around 8 years. This was a task that entailed a huge amount of work, tact and diplomacy. It was no mean feat to do this job but Alex did it with nothing but enthusiasm and encouragement; always doing his best to help junior pharmacologists get their work published. Bob recalls that anyone working in the department late Friday afternoon was fair game – Mm..., could you take a glance at this manuscript over the

weekend? – the authors and referee(s) are daggers drawn – I'd better not show you their vitriolic communications – enough said. He was an expert arbitrator of such disagreements and never, ever lost his cool!

Alex often worked as an external examiner and forged long friendships with colleagues from other universities. Jim Parratt is one such friend who thinks that Alex knew even more about music and the theatre than about cardiovascular pharmacology. Jim recalls meetings with Alex and Rosalind at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow and especially, and for many years, after the chamber music concerts at the Queens Hall in Edinburgh during the Festival. I do not think Alex was a practicing musician, but he and Rosalind had a deep love for 'classical' music about which he was most knowledgeable. After these concerts we often went to my favourite Edinburgh Italian restaurant, at which Alex usually chose the wine, being something of an expert. Good gift for a cardiovascular pharmacologist! Regrets? Of course, because distance and age came between an even deeper friendship. For example, I am uncertain whether we talked about our early lives and our different backgrounds (he was certainly not an 'east-ender') or about our varied family experiences of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But these things made no difference to a greatly valued friendship with a cultured, courteous, humble and greatly gifted fellow scientist.

We thank Alex for his contribution to pharmacology, and, on a personal note to our lives.

Shared memories by Bob Jones, Kathy Kane and Jim Parratt.