Sam Seifter Tribute

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Sam Seifter played an important role in the seminal work by Louis Pillemer on complement (two more different kinds of personalities can hardly be imagined).

Legendary kindness and understanding.

Eleanor, truly his other half, who has shared with him – among many other aspects – a deep dedication to teaching and a deep commitment to those they have taught or worked with.

I have known many excellent teachers (among them Ernst Scharrer who taught me anatomy at Reserve, before he moved to AEMS as professor), but none could match Sam in the breadth of interests and knowledge. To my mind, he has simply been the best. And then his phenomenal memory, he is a veritable walking encyclopedia. But knowledge without judgment means little. His understanding of human and scientific matters characterizes not just his work but his entire life. My own life has had its ups and downs, but Sam has never failed me whenever I sought his help and advice.

If this account should read like a hagiography, so be it. It is his fault – for being such a wonderful human being, scientist, and friend who has lived his beliefs and convictions.

Respect of others.

Strong opinions without being opinionated.

Sam and I first met in the fall of 1943 when I came to Cleveland to join the Department of Pharmacology of Western Reserve Medical School as a very junior instructor while he (three years older than me!) was a research fellow.

I immediately experienced the full impact of what so many others have also enjoyed: Sam’s great power of empathy and thoughtful caring for others. He accepts other people for what they are, never stereotyping them. A roll-call of those he has worked with illustrates his deep appreciation of people from diverse backgrounds.

If what I have remembered reads like hagiography, I make no excuses. For I have described a caring, empathizing, very human being who has enriched the life of all who have worked with him, or in other ways been associated with him or taught by him. Dedicating this issue of the journal to him is an expression of the great affection, gratitude, and admiration that have been felt for him by so many, so deeply.

Cruel and devastating politics of the McCarthy conspiracy. Sam refused to give the names of his colleagues and their details when inspection into everyone’s background was being carried out as per Senator McCarthy’s policy.

Not only did this have immediate dire consequences but no one at the time could foresee the end.

A true polymath: knowledge of and fascination with many subjects and activities.

I don’t think I have ever asked him a question about a topic without getting an informed and well-considered answer.

His extraordinary strength of character and will has allowed him to meet and overcome many of the physical problems of aging: his mind remains as sharp as ever.

He has, of course, been a wonderful example to his children and grandchildren and their partners.

There is an inner core of steel in him, even though he is soft-hearted with others. He can have a wicked sense of humor but never at the expense of others. He is, of course, great company and we can rarely stop talking when we meet – now sadly only once a year because I live on another continent.

Although we have lived on different continents now for over 50 years, whenever we meet we immediately resume our friendship, the years falling away, the past fusing with the present.