ASBMB Reminiscences

As part of our Centennial Celebration, we recently asked members to contribute reminiscences of their early thoughts about becoming a scientist, their experience as postdocs, their first paper published, their first lecture at an ASBMB Meeting, the friendships and connections they formed with other ASBMB members, their impressions of the first ASBMB meeting they attended, and anything else they thought pertinent. Here is the first such contribution received. We believe you will find it interesting, and we look forward to receiving and publishing more reminiscences. Please send them to editor@asbmb.org.

When I was working for my Ph. D. in biochemistry at the University of Chicago, my supervisor Birgit Vennesland suggested I present a paper on some of my research at a FASEB meeting in Detroit. (The year was either 1947 or 1948, as I recall.) When the abstracts came out, we learned that I would be speaking on the afternoon of the last day of the meetings, and was indeed the last paper in that session.

One or more of the experienced graduate students in the department—Eugene Kennedy, Morris Friedkin, Irving Zabin as I recall—warned me that being the last speaker on the last afternoon would probably mean that few if anyone would be there to hear my paper. I was pretty disheartened by their warnings and spoke to Dr. Vennesland about the matter. She replied to the effect that she was confident that I would have a reasonable audience and tried to make me feel more optimistic about giving my first paper at a FASEB meeting.

When the fatal day came and I went up to the podium to present my work, I saw that Dr. Vennesland was as good as her word. In the audience were Carl and Gerty Cori, Sarah Ratner, Albert Lehninger and Frank Putnam (both of whom were assistant pros at Chicago (and outranked by Vennesland at that time). I think Konrad Bloch and Herbert Anker were also there.

As my years of association with Birgit Vennesland went on, I realized what a supportive supervisor she was. I’ve tried to “pay her back” by providing such support to my students over the years.

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