
Further reminiscences...

Eric Terzaghi

First, David, I would like to join the rest of your friends and colleagues gathered here in wishing you a memorable 70th birthday. Many Happy Returns! Having long since dipped out of science, I do feel privileged to be among the invited guests.

Tim has summarised the trials and tribulations of the early years at Massey. My wife Betty and I arrived in New Zealand as part of the 'second wave' at Massey and, in the case of Betty, at the Dairy Research Institute, to be faced with the second round of culture clash, namely the brash new molecular genetics colliding with the established brilliant successes of classical biochemistry. Cell Biology, as Tim and David's first year paper came to be known, was well established and provided a point of entry for DNA and RNA into the local scene. A Stage Two Genetics paper had also already been introduced in support of the departmental title of Microbiology and Genetics, but more advanced offerings were required for a major in genetics. Several of us, including, as I recall, Adam Wilkins and Brian Jarvis, were intrigued by the notion, already widely acknowledged overseas, that sequences, whether nucleotide or amino acid, represented historical archival information. Hence the decision to introduce Molecular Evolution as a third- or fourth-year paper. Enter David Penny. With his customary, as Tim already has noted, cheerful disregard of departmental boundaries (and other bureaucratic restraints), David joined us, bringing with him the only genuine evolutionary expertise among us. He also, as I recall, provided strong support for our vaguely Socratic approach to the topic. Although David did his degree in plant physiology, I understand that he fairly quickly realised from the peripheral position, figuratively and literally, of the Botany Department, that laboratory-based research would be an uphill battle. Hence, perhaps heeding the early, at the time shocking, comment of Wally Gilbert, to the effect that the biology of the future would be conducted at a keyboard, the messy bits being outsourced, David opted for a line of endeavour which utilised a relatively well resourced university facility, namely the Computer Centre. Again crossing departmental and even

faculty, boundaries with cheerful impunity, David teamed up with Mike Hendy, then of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, which like Botany occupied a nether region, in this case the Faculty of Social Sciences. That very productive association, of course, laid the foundation for the Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution.

In a totally different vein, perhaps even pre-dating David's involvement in the Molecular Evolution paper, I recall the publication in the *National Business Review* of a series of four articles written by David. In these he presented a carefully researched and well articulated argument in support of a substantial improvement in the support for basic research in New Zealand. With all due respects, David, I think that was among your best pieces of writing, though unfortunately, it seemed at the time to have fallen on the proverbial deaf ears. That you and your faithful band have brought to pass the Allan Wilson Centre must be regarded as a bit of either poetic justice or divine intervention.

On a more personal level, Betty and I recall with great pleasure the evening meals we shared with David and other colleagues at our house. These sessions served as the 'working parties' for putting together our annotated reader in Molecular Evolution, which was a direct result of the Molecular Evolution paper undertaken initially out of almost idle curiosity,

And finally, there was an early indication of David's potential for Distinguished Professorial status. At one stage of his career, he commuted to Palmerston North from home in Wellington. During this period, the former Ministry of Works undertook a rearrangement of the intersection of the State Highway and Old West Road, without either consulting with or informing David. As he did the commute largely on autopilot, an unfortunate consequence of this unannounced realignment led to David parking his vehicle in a Massey paddock. No serious damage done, I believe, just a timely reminder of human frailty, and that autopilots are not necessarily all that great!

Eric Terzaghi joined the Microbiology and Genetics Department at Massey University in 1973 and retired as an Associate Professor in 1992. Over the next five years, Eric assisted with the establishment of a genetics teaching programme at the School of Biological Sciences, University of Auckland.

Currently Eric and his wife Betty farm deer at Warkworth in the upper North Island of New Zealand.