ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ASHI Without Bias

By Mary S. Leffell, PhD and Andrea A. Zachary, PhD

Many, if not most, of us find ourselves accompanied by biases—in our scientific endeavors, in our political inclinations and in our personal lives. ASHI and the fields of histocompatibility and immunogenetics have benefited from one bias in particular: Wilma Bias. On July 1 of this year, Wilma officially retired, and we are taking this opportunity to thank her for her many contributions to the field, to those who work in the field and to ASHI. For those of us who have passed the quarter century mark in this business, we are aware of how hard Wilma has worked and sometimes fought for advancement of the field, its members and for the many organizations that represent those members. Like many, Wilma began her immunogenetics career in the red cell area, working on mapping the genes for red cell antigens and conducting clinical trials on RhoGam prophylaxis to prevent HLA sensitization. She was among the original core group that founded the South- eastern Organ Procurement Foundation and was an active participant in early international workshops in histocompatibility testing in gene mapping and in transplantation. Before the idea of ASHI, the American Association for Clinical Histocompatibility Testing (AACHT) was formulated. Wilma was part of a renegade group called CRABS that sought to develop a standardized set of reagents for HLA typing. That group, along with a few others, became the founders of ASHI (AACHT). Wilma had the good fortune of being a member of ASHI Council in the days when Council meetings were marathon sessions beginning early on a Friday evening and ending sometime on Sunday—with a few hours break in between. While working hard to get our then fledgling organization off the ground, Wilma continued to pursue her scientific career and develop a laboratory program that supported not only clinical testing for transplantation, but multiple investigations into the role of HLA in disease and immune regulation. Recognition of her efforts came when she became the first woman PhD to become professor of medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Wilma was also the first of our members to be appointed to the National Advisory Allergy and Infectious Disease Council of the National Institutes of Health.

Wilm Bias, PhD

More than 15 years ago, Wilma put forth and pursued the idea of certification in the field. Her efforts, along with those of several others, resulted in the formation of a task force to investigate certification of technologists. That task force led to the formation of ABHI and the first technologist certification program in our field. Wilma also foresaw the value and eventual need for doctoral certification. It took the rest of us a few more years to catch onto that idea.

A short time later, Wilma realized the need for an educational program that provided a review of all the scientific, technical and administrative principles necessary for those who supervised HLA laboratories. Thus, with Wilma's foresight, planning and guidance, combined with the hard work and organizational skills of Louise Jacobbi, the SEOPF Histocompatibility Specialist Course, whose graduates now number in the hundreds, was born. It was not long after that the winds of transplantation began to change and with passage of the National Organ Transplant Act, we saw the formation of the National Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (NOPTN). Thanks to the members of the advisory board that helped establish the criteria for the NOPTN, histocompatibility was acknowledged as an important discipline in transplantation. When UNOS was awarded the first contract for administration of the NOPTN, Wilma went to work to position ASHI as a key player. Through energetic networking, Wilma negotiated not only ASHI representation on the UNOS Board, but also utilization of the ASHI Accreditation Program as the review system for laboratories serving UNOS transplant programs. This provided recognition of ASHI as the organization that had set the gold standard in histocompatibility testing and set the ground for ASHI's ability to achieve deemed status as a federally accepted accrediting agency. Wilma also helped the development of UNOS during its formative years by conducting several studies to fulfill tasks required in the NOPTN contract. One such study, that has been resurrected as a valuable approach to transplanting sensitized patients, was the UNOS Task B study to evaluate the ability to predict crossmatch outcome based on serum screening data.

This year Wilma is being recognized for her "contributions to the fields of immunology, histocompatibility and genetics" by being awarded the Morton Grove Rasmussen Award by the American Association of Blood Banks. We think ASHI is indebted to Wilma for her many contributions and invite you to join us in offering her our thanks.