

## Olaf K. Skinsnes

1917–1997

Olaf Skinsnes was born 20 April 1917 in Henan, central China, the son of a Norwegian-American missionary surgeon. He received his primary and secondary education in a mission school, the American school in Kikungshan, China, and then came to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, U.S.A., where he earned his bachelor's degree. He then attended the University of Chicago where he earned both an M.D. and Ph.D. In 1949 he arrived in Hong Kong on his way to a teaching position in pathology which had been arranged at a medical school in China. Due to the political changes occurring in China at that time, it was not possible for him to proceed. Instead he took a position at the University of Hong Kong.

At the University of Hong Kong he began his research on the pathology and immunology of leprosy, a study which lasted for the rest of his life. While there he became a co-founder of the Hay Ling Chau

leprosarium. After 10 years in Hong Kong he returned to the University of Chicago for 8 years. Then he became one of the founding faculty members of the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii. Upon his retirement from the University of Hawaii in 1985, he was invited to return to the country of his birth by Dr. Ma Haide. He accepted a faculty appointment in the Department of Pathology at Sun Yat Sen University of Medical Sciences, where he also served as an advisor on leprosy control and research and assisted in the publication of the *China Leprosy Journal*. In 1988 he suffered the first of a series of strokes which gradually took their toll and eventually forced his return to the United States, where he died on 21 December 1997.

Dr. Skinsnes had a long and distinguished career as a teacher. He brought this spirit of a teacher to the editorship of this Journal from 1968 until 1978. He con-



Dr. Skinsnes and Guo Hua Zhao, his last graduate student, who is now a post-doctoral fellow at Stanford University.

stantly worked with authors to improve their work and to encourage further work and further thinking. For decades his research remained at the forefront of our knowledge about leprosy. His landmark explanation of the immunology of leprosy (Skinsnes, O. K. The immunological spectrum of leprosy. In: *Leprosy in Theory and Practice*, R. G. Cochrane and T. F. Davey, eds. Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Co., 1964, pp. 156–182.) correctly predicted the fundamental concepts of the disease's immunology years before their experimental verification and years before there were even the basic concepts of "modern immunology." These observations came from a brilliant, analytical mind with an extraordinary ability to keenly observe

and formulate unifying concepts. These are the attributes of a great teacher, and Dr. Skinsnes was exactly that, a great teacher. Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife and children at their loss. Our sympathies go out to all leprosy workers who have lost one of the truly great minds and truly great hearts to ever work in our cause.

The feeling cannot be expressed more appropriately than Dr. Skinsnes did on these pages in reference to Dr. Esmond Long in 1968 (IJL 36:450, 1968) which I repeated to him when I became editor of this Journal in 1979 (IJL 47:60, 1979): "As a Chinese saying has it, 'He who is for one day my teacher, is my father for life.'"

—RCH