

EDITORIAL

A Significant Milestone: The Big 5-0

Two years ago, aware of the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of the founding of ASBMB, the Society's Executive decided that some sort of celebration was in order. Towards this end, the two of us were recruited, Rebecca as Honorary Archivist, and Liana as Special Projects Officer. Together with Phillip Nagley, then Editor and President-Elect, and Clem Robinson, who was to assume the editorial role the following year, it was quickly decided that a special commemorative issue of the magazine be produced. At the start, none of us was really certain what material would be included in such an issue. Through a series of meetings of the Golden Jubilee Planning Group, which additionally included Samantha Richardson, ideas were put forward, discussed, debated, and finally agreed upon. The result is a publication, in the pages of this commemorative issue of the *Australian Biochemist*, which not only documents the evolution of the Society over the past 50 years, but also looks optimistically to the future of ASBMB.

The Golden Jubilee issue begins with decade-by-decade highlights of the Society compiled by Liana, from its birth in 1955 as the Australian Biochemical Society, through its professional coming-of-age, exemplified not only by a change in name, but also a change in attitude to finances and administration, and onto its current status as a mature, internationally regarded society. As part of the research for this article, we interviewed over 25 past and present office bearers, a tremendously rewarding and enlightening experience for both of us. Liana then undertook the enormous task of transcribing these interviews, reviewing them for recurrent themes and revealing quotes, reading through pages and pages of often rather dry Council and AGM minutes, and distilling all this information down to the salient points, covered in this historical overview. We also sourced as many vintage photographs as we could to bring this history to life. Also reproduced in this issue are two previously published articles: a historical perspective on the beginning of Australian biochemistry by Victor Trikojus published in *Trends in Biochemical Sciences* in 1978, and an article on the founding of ABS by Keith Rienits which appeared in the Society Newsletter in 1989. Together, these articles convey just how much Australian biochemistry and molecular biology and the Society have changed in 50 years.

One of the biggest changes the Society (and society in lower-case letters!) has witnessed is the expanding opportunities for, and contributions by, women. As part of our interview series, we talked to eight prominent women biochemists to get their personal perspectives on the progress (and sometimes, lack thereof) they have seen over the course of their careers. Although their individual experiences vary, there is general consensus that most of the obstacles impeding women's success have been cleared, and that very little, if any, overt sexism remains within our discipline. Nonetheless, we still await the arrival of true parity; as noted

Looking forward to many more good ASBMB memories in the future,

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within this article, only a handful of women hold professorial appointments, have been awarded the Society's top medals or have held positions on the Executive. However, given the current number of female ASBMB State Representatives, as well as Fellowship recipients, it's only a matter of time...

Also included in this issue is a series of short commentaries by ASBMB members, entitled 'Then and Now', which reflect on particular aspects of the working life of biochemists over the years. In these, George Rogers discusses how the never-ending quest for research funding has changed; Cyril Curtain discusses how vital advances in technology have been to biochemical research; Clem Robinson reflects on the visits of prominent overseas speakers; Gerry Wake remembers the difficulties in keeping up-to-date with the literature; Phil Board amuses us with the life of 1950s PhD student Earl E. Bird and his latter-day protégé, John E. Comelately; Philip Kuchel documents the evolution of NMR spectroscopy and its new role as a window into the metabolome of the cell; and Graham Parlson recalls the genesis of the Biochemical Education Special Interest Group. Following on from these articles are two pieces from recent Roche medallists, Trevor Lithgow and Kieran Kirk, which focus on the future of Australian biochemistry and molecular biology from their own personal perspectives.

Many of the regular features of the *Australian Biochemist* are still included in this issue, but with a historical twist. For example, NZSBMB President Sigurd Wilbanks writes of the the history of our sister society over the past half-century, while Mark Wakeham's 'IP Matters' discusses the development of patent law over the same period. A recent biography detailing the extraordinary life of one of the Society's founding fathers, Victor Trikojus, is reviewed by Bill Sawyer, who followed (although not immediately!) in Trikojus' footsteps as Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Melbourne. Even features such as the profiles of the current ASBMB Medallists and Fellowship Awardees have taken on a retrospective flavour, with a brief history of each award being presented. Finally, scattered throughout the issue are memorable images from the past 50 years of the Australian biochemistry and molecular biology – look closely, you may find some familiar faces and see how we have changed!

We hope you enjoy this special commemorative issue of the *Australian Biochemist* – it was a pleasure to have overseen its production and to have had the opportunity to interact with so many of the Society's members. We thank everyone who has contributed articles, images, interviews, information, photographs and memories. If anyone has archival material that they wish to make available to the Society, please let us know – the Golden Jubilee has stirred ASBMB to archive its rich history (for the next jubilee celebrations perhaps!).

In the next issue... In December, Showcase on Research will be on **RNA** – Guest Editor: Stan Stasinopoulos

Australian Biochemist – Editor Clem Robinson, Editorial Officer Liana Friedman
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is a great honour for me to be President of ASBMB in the Golden Jubilee year of the Society. This issue of the *Australian Biochemist* brings together a whole host of historical material, as well as reflections on ABS/ASBMB and the place of biochemistry and molecular biology in the world of science and technology. I commend the contents of this Golden Jubilee issue for your reading pleasure.

Phillip Nagley



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- *Other sources of information:*
Biographical Memoirs, Australian Academy of Science [<http://www.science.org.au/academy/memoirs/>];
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