

## Obituary

### Wagner H. Bridger, M.D.

Dr. Wagner H. Bridger, former Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the Medical College of Pennsylvania died on February 10 after a long illness at the age of 81. His parents came from Eastern Europe of good non-religious Jewish stock. His father, unschooled but highly educated had two sons. One of them he named Wagner after the great composer, the other Dante, after the Italian poet. This could not have been the easiest thing for the two boys in New York during and after the war. Wagner's social activism probably derived from his father and clearly was an important part of his life.

Wagner went to NYU as an undergraduate and graduated M.D. at the age of 22. He interned in Chicago, entered his residency at NYU followed by a research fellowship at Hopkins. This later resulted in his first publication with Horsley Gantt, the Dean of Pavlovian Psychology at that time. Later he was associated with the Albert Einstein College of Medicine for 26 years before assuming the chairmanship of the Department of Psychiatry at the then Medical College of Pennsylvania where I joined him in 1984. This was a fully accredited training program which had no lectures in psychopharmacology at that time.

In September of 1984 I gave one lecture on Schizophrenia to cover the history, diagnosis, genetics and treatment. There were three lectures on the psychodynamics of schizophrenia. Within a short duration of time, Wagner created a department that had a national reputation and a beginning international reputation with people like Alan Bellack, Emil Coccarro, Edna Foa, Ira Katz, Doug Levenson, and me, all of whom had NIMH grants. All this changed dramatically when the mission of the medical school changed from an effort to produce science to an effort to produce money. Wagner was very good at getting people to come and work with him and do interesting things.

However, he was neither very good nor very interested in making money. This sudden urge to make money, which appeared to hit a lot of medical schools at this time, was reminiscent of what recently happened in Wall Street. All these changes were opposed by several Chairs but only in private. The old covenanter hymn goes, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone" and that was Wagner. He was the only Chair who opposed these unfortunate happenings. In the end what had been a historical women's medical college that had change its name to the Medical College of Pennsylvania disappeared.

He had published conditioning studies from his beginning day at Hopkins. These studies included neonates and children with time out to publish a refutation of Jensen's position on "Intelligence Race, Social Class and Heredity." He published over 100 papers, was a founding member of the Society of Biological Psychiatry and President of the Society in 1988 and Editor of the journal from 1992-1997. He was active in many other organizations such as the Society of Research and Child Development, Planned Parenthood of New York, the Medical Committee for Human Rights as well as the ACNP.

Those who knew Wagner will remember him most for his pleasant, provocative puckish mode of questioning and arguing and his ability to get to the heart of a problem very quickly. He had an enormous talent for getting on with people despite his ability to stand up for what he believed in and he will be remembered for his distinguished mentorship, lover of science, life, family, martinis and cigars. He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Rita Hayes Bridger, seven children and eleven grand children.

George M Simpson, M.D.  
LAC+USC School of Medicine  
Dept of Psychiatry & the Behavioral Sciences  
2020 Zonal Street Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic  
IRD Rm 204 Los Angeles, CA 90033

Ph: (323) 226-5363  
Fx: (323) 226-6499  
Email: [gsimpson@usc.edu](mailto:gsimpson@usc.edu)

