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In Memory

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IN MEMORY OF
MATHIAS P. MERTES, 1932-1989

Dr. Mathias P. Mertes, well-known medicinal chemist, member of the Editorial Advisory Board of *Nucleosides & Nucleotides*, and a good friend, died unexpectedly earlier this year. An obituary written by Drs. Gary Grunewald and Robert Hanzlik of the University of Kansas is presented below followed by a list of the publications of Dr. Mertes. Many of us have pleasant memories of stimulating interactions with Matt. We can hope that the spirit and enthusiasm with which Matt approached science has rubbed off on some of us. He will be missed.

JAS

Mathias P. Mertes, Professor of Medicinal Chemistry at the University of Kansas, died suddenly at the age of 56 of a heart attack in his home in Lawrence, Kansas on Thursday, April 6, 1989. Matt was born in Chicago on April 22, 1932. He grew up in Chicago and got his first taste of pharmacy delivering prescriptions on his bicycle for his father's neighborhood pharmacy. He received a B.S. degree in pharmacy at the University of Illinois in 1954, where he became interested in research. He entered graduate school and received a M.S. in medicinal chemistry with C. O. Wilson at the University of Texas in 1956, followed by a Ph.D. in medicinal chemistry with Ole Gisvold at the University of Minnesota in 1960. Matt was proud of his academic heritage and was delighted when he recently obtained a replacement of his lost copy of the first edition of the famous medicinal chemistry text by Wilson and Gisvold. Upon completion of his Ph.D. he accepted a position at the University of Kansas as an assistant professor of medicinal chemistry. There he joined Ed Smissman, who had just moved to Kansas as chairman of medicinal chemistry and who had been an undergraduate instructor of Matt's at the University of Illinois. Together they built a strong and vigorous department and established many traditions that persist today.

Matt excelled in all three of the classic academic vocations -- teaching, service and research. As a teacher he was extremely dedicated. He was popular with graduate and undergraduate students alike, and he won several major teaching awards. He was one of the pioneers in advocating and providing continuing education for practicing pharmacists in Kansas and looked forward with great enthusiasm to continuing education seminar trips around the state. He was also one of the founders of the highly successful medicinal chemistry meeting-in-miniature (MIKI Meeting) held annually since 1962 on a rotating basis among the Universities of Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and Illinois.

Matt received an NIH Career Development Award (1967-72), during which time he spent one year in the laboratory of F. Sorm at the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences in Prague (nucleic acid chemistry). He also spent sixth months at the University of Colorado studying *in vitro* translation by mRNA. Matt was extremely active in research, working in areas as diverse as nucleic acid chemistry, inhibition of thymidylate synthetase, design and synthesis of selective glutamate receptor probes, and in collaboration with his wife, Kristin Mertes, Professor of Chemistry at Kansas, design and synthesis of polyammonium macrocycles with emphasis on catalytic mechanism studies of ATP hydrolysis. In 1983 he and Kristin spent a sabbatical in the laboratory of 1987 Nobel laureate Jean-Marie Lehn at Strasbourg, and they have collaborated with the French group ever since. During his career Matt published over 100 scientific papers and directed 23 graduate students to the Ph.D. degree, in addition to training 5 M.S. students and a number of postdocs. At Kansas Matt served as Chairman of the Department of Medicinal Chemistry during 1974-75 following Ed Smismann's death. He served as Chairman of the Division of Medicinal Chemistry of the American Chemical Society in 1978, as Vice Chairman in 1977, and served on the Division's membership, long-range planning and membership directory committees. He also served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry* and *Nucleosides and Nucleotides* and reviewed manuscripts for many other journals. His service also included a four-year term on Medicinal Chemistry A Study Section at NIH and another four-year term on the NIH Biomedical Research Support Committee.

Matt was characteristically forward-thinking and was an eternal optimist; he often reminded his colleagues at Kansas that they should focus on where they and their department should be five years from now. He was full of happiness and expectations the day before his death; he had just concluded the successful Ph.D. oral exam of his most senior student, and was making plans for his annual fishing trip to Minnesota and for his next sabbatical. He was also an avid ski enthusiast and a dedicated poker player. He and Kristin had a fondness for entertaining visitors to campus, and they always managed to draw their guests into animated discussions of science that often lasted late into the night. Frances Degan Horowitz, Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Studies at Kansas, remarked, "He was always available to help on projects that transcended his lab, his department, his school, his adopted state. He did all this with personal grace, with uncommon gentleness and with generous spirit. Such personal qualities ensure that our memories of an exceptional friend and colleague will remain vivid, inspiring and enduring". The Kansas University Endowment Association has established the Mathias Mertes Memorial Fund.

Gary L. Grunewald and Robert P. Hanzlik
University of Kansas

Research Publications

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