

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Pat Waller, NABT President-2007



Dear Biology Educator,

Summer is upon us. What a great feeling! Another year of successes, another group of students to send out of your classroom with a better understanding of the living world. For many of my colleagues, this is a time to do some of the things we never have time for during the school year. High on their list is reading. Each summer I look forward to reading just fun books—for me, these are mysteries. However, each summer I do select a few books to challenge my knowledge of biology and look for books that provide me real life impact of biological activities. Where do I find ideas for my reading selections? Usually, I go back through my copies of *The American Biology Teacher* (ABT) checking the book reviews. The other part of my reading list comes from conversations, other book reviews, and rereads of previous books. I thought I would share with you some of my choices for this summer.

In the February issue of ABT, John Z. Kiss of the Department of Botany, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, reviewed *Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code* by Matt Ridley. Within Dr. Kiss's review he suggested that the *Double Helix* written by James Watson in 1986 be reread as evidence of the personality of Francis Crick. I have read the *Double Helix* but my focus was not on Francis Crick. Reading the two books during the same time should bring a sharper focus to the activities involved in thinking about the process of science thought. So there are two books for my summer reading.

Well, as long as I am doing two books at a time, my personal challenge this summer is to compare two critical environmental science books: *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson published in 1962 and *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of*

Global Warming and What We Can Do About It by Al Gore in 2006. Erika V. Iyengar of the Biology Department of Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, reviewed *An Inconvenient Truth* in the January issue of ABT. In her review, Dr. Iyengar points out that Mr. Gore carefully included graphs and photographs to support his statements. In contrast, in my copy of Rachel Carson's book there are only sketches on the first page of each chapter. I will be reading to see how Rachel Carson's words alone were able to capture the attention of citizens and the government. I will be thinking about how the graphs and photos in *An Inconvenient Truth* will be impacting readers. I will be asking myself: Is the use of graphs and photographs a reflection of the impact of science on what readers now require for support of arguments? Is the change from words to graphics an indication of our population's reluctance to read through descriptions? Or is the nature of the arguments better supported through words in *Silent Spring* and visuals in *An Inconvenient Truth*? In between there are other books I will read. One of them will be *Brave New World*.

In light of the biotechnology that has been in the news in recent years, I look forward to rereading *Brave New World* written by Aldous Huxley in 1932. I first read this book in 1980. It was assigned in a bioethics course. Each time I think of this book, my reflections are on what was known in biology at the time it was written, at the time I first read the book, and at my current reading. These reflections make rereading the book new each time. Remember, when *Brave New World* was written science did not include an understanding of the role of chemical balances and behavior, genetics and environment; the idea of conditioning as a path to learning was in its infancy. At the time of my first reading, the first "test tube" baby had been born. The role of genes and the pathway of protein synthesis were considered a breakthrough.

When I sit down to read now, we have medications that modify behavior so that citizens with chemical imbalances can lead productive lives. The headlines tell us about stored embryos and surrogate mothers. Essentially, the human genome sequencing is available for study. I know I will see more similarities to our current situation than what I saw in 1980.

These are the books I hope to read this summer. However, I want to recommend a book that captured my attention this winter. It is a mystery with quite a bit of science. I think this author shows how science is not free of the personalities of scientists, the politics of governments, and the determination of individuals to pursue a scientific investigation. *The Family That Couldn't Sleep* by D. T. Max was published in 2006. Through one family and the history of the study of prions, the author leads the reader to understand that science is an on-going process. You can probably name a few prion diseases: kuru, scrapie, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, and the most recently infamous, mad cow disease. The book does produce some unsettling thoughts about our level of knowledge, how governments react to diseases that are out of the ordinary, and the effort needed to understand a condition that occurs within a family. The author presents the information in a very readable form. My friends who are not science people found the storyline strong enough to keep their interest.

With that said, I wish you a great summer of reading. Take some time for yourself. Before you know it, you will be moving along with your students through the exciting discoveries that are biology today. Enjoy!

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