OBITUARY

Christian Rudolf Hubert Raetz, MD PhD, 1946–2011

As many of the readers of Glycobiology have undoubtedly heard or read, Christian R. H. Raetz passed away August 16, 2011, after a three-year battle with anaplastic thyroid cancer. Much has been written about Chris, with recent articles appearing in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS 2011 108:17255) and the Journal of Biological Chemistry (J Biol Chem. 2011 286:e6–8). William Dowhan, a close friend of Chris, authored the following article. It was published in the Journal of Lipid Research (J. Lipid Res. 2011 52:1857) and is reprinted here with permission. It tells much about Chris in a way that is difficult to improve.

Chris trained many students and fellows in his career. I had the distinct honor of being his first graduate student, which was probably both a curse and a blessing for both of us. Mentors are like parents. Chris was my intellectual patriarch and guide. He was critical at times, but I never doubted his unqualified support. One of his outstanding traits was his ability to provide direction without being overpowering. He made me feel that my accomplishments reflected my ability, not his, even when the latter was true. And later he treated me with the respect of a colleague and friend. I count myself incredibly fortunate to have maintained that bond for 35 years. We talked for the last time a few days before his death. He discussed his therapy options with the same passionate rigor he applied to all scientific problems. At the end of our conversation, I asked him how the lab was doing in his absence. He said that he had a couple of really good post-docs that could run things, and his parting words were, “I have two new crystal structures.” I laughed. I will miss our conversation.

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The Raetz Pathway for Lipid A Biosynthesis: Christian Rudolf Hubert Raetz, MD, PhD. 1946–2011

Chris Raetz passed away on August 16, 2011 after a three-year battle with anaplastic thyroid cancer. His passing represents an extraordinary loss to the lipid community. Chris was born in East Berlin in 1946 and immigrated with his parents to the United States in 1951. He entered Yale University in 1963 and followed in both his parents’ footsteps by majoring in chemistry. He entered Harvard Medical School in 1967 in pursuit of an M.D., but his past interests in chemistry led him to the research bench in the laboratory of Eugene Kennedy. He received his M.D. and Ph.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1973. After a year as house officer at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Chris spent two years as a post-doctoral fellow with Herbert Tabor at the NIH in Bethesda and then joined the biochemistry faculty at the University of Wisconsin in 1976 and rapidly rose through the ranks to full professor. Chris left academia from 1987 to 1993 to join Merck Research Laboratories, first as executive director of biochemistry and later as executive vice president of research in biochemistry and microbiology. In 1993 he became the George Barth Geller Professor and Chair of Biochemistry at Duke University Medical Center. He served as chair until 2007 and remained on the faculty until his passing.

Chris Raetz’s most noted contributions to phospholipid and lipopolysaccharide biochemistry fall into four areas: 1) the...