



John V. Basmajian, M.D.
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John Basmajian, O. C., O. Ont., MD, FRCPC, FRCPS (Glasgow), FACRM (Australia), FACA, FABMR, FASBM, was an extraordinary man who, despite his diminutive figure was, to so many he touched, bigger than life. His passion for knowledge and his commitment to the training of physicians, allied health professionals, electromyographers, and movement and exercise scientists was legendary. The heart of this gentle man served to inspire those starting their clinical and research careers and to drive those already in motion to greater heights, to achieve aspirations that, without his guiding touch, might never have been reached.

His skills as an anatomist were remarkable. His ability to fill an entire lecture with one colored chalk drawing upon which he would build layer upon layer of three dimensional structures would captivate medical and health sciences students. His acumen in the dissecting room is now a trait few can emulate. Not only could “Dr. B.” perform meticulous dissections, inevitably historical antecedents regarding famous scientists or anatomists who first described relevant structures or their anomalies would spew forth in a most inconspicuous manner, as though he was talking to them and they were actually at his side.

After graduating from the University of Toronto’s School of Medicine 1945, John aspired to become an orthopedic surgeon but health concerns prevented him from following this course. Nonetheless, his passion for the study of movement inevitably fueled his love of human anatomy and, in particular, the musculoskeletal system. This life-time romance resulted in the publication of many anatomy texts including: *Primary Anatomy*, *Surface Anatomy*, and *Grant’s Method of Anatomy*. He particularly loved to examine the structure and function of muscle. In this capacity he literally self-taught electromyography realizing well before most scientists, let alone clinicians, that an understanding of muscle activity patterns under a variety of movement situations could serve as a foundation for the specification and assessment of therapeutic interventions. This mode of investigation quickly became an obsession culminating in the world renown, *Muscles Alive: Their*

Functions Revealed By Electromyography. This text was continuously updated through 5 editions (1962-1985), the last of which was co-authored with one of his outstanding past graduate students, Carlo Deluca. I was fortunate to witness first hand how this labor of love was cultivated. “Br. B.” would simply get his hands on every EMG article written between editions of the book and place hard copies within the appropriate locations of the previous edition in preparation for writing the next. His obsession with EMG resulted in the birth of several other texts: *Clinical Electroneurography*, *Computers in Electromyography* (written during the “early years PDP DEC mega sized, low-memory capacity, behemoths), *Electrodiagnosis*, and *Neuromotor Examination of the Limbs*.

EMG applications quickly led to the discovery that given appropriate visual and auditory feedback of amplified, raw muscle signals, individuals could isolate and control single motor units within the recording radius of fine-wire electrodes. From his seminal studies in the 1960’s emerged what became known as “EMG Biofeedback” and with the birth of this rapidly advancing field came the proclamation from all those clinicians and scientists whose lives he touched, that Basmajian was indeed the “Father of EMG Biofeedback”. His interest in this area contributed to his role as a founder of the Biofeedback Research Society later to become the Biofeedback Society of America (for which he served as its 10th president in 1979) and then the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback. From these collective efforts several additional highly acclaimed edited texts emerged including: *Biofeedback: Principles and Practice of Clinicians*, *Electrode Placement in EMG Biofeedback*, and the last of which, *Therapeutic Exercise*, I had the honor to co-edit.

In addition John edited many other texts as a continuation of the infamous Sidney Licht Rehabilitation Series, including: *Medical Rehabilitation*, *Stroke Rehabilitation*, *Rational Manual Therapies*, *Physical Rehabilitation Outcome Measures*, *Orthotics*, and *Clinical Practice and Rehabilitation Technology: Efficacy and Outcomes*. When one adds to this impressive textbook portfolio over 400 publications, the productivity of this rather humble man becomes rather overwhelming. Yet his talents resulted in election to many society presidencies including the Society of Electromyographic Kinesiology (1968-1972) and the American Association of Anatomists (1986). He served on multiple editorial boards, received many fellowship designations, was invited as a keynote lecturer in virtually every major country throughout the world, and was a recipient of many awards from anatomical and rehabilitation organizations. His perspective on life and his appreciation for those around him are captured in his autobiography, *I.O.U. – Adventures of a Medical Scientist*.

Perhaps no greater recognition can be afforded any citizen than that from their native country. His scientific achievements were recognized by Ontario province when he received the Order of Ontario (1991) and by the Canadian government when he was awarded the highest civilian honor of the country as an Officer of the Order of Canada (O. C.) in 1994 for “his pioneering work in electromyography, which had a significant impact on the development of biofeedback techniques”. He was instrumental in forming the International Society of Electromyography and Kinesiology (ISEK) and was so honored by having a lectureship established in his name (1996).

His “Atlanta family” was born when he made the decision to come to Emory University in 1969 where he served as Director of the Regional Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (1969-1977), having left his post as Professor of Anatomy at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. At Emory he was given full professorships in the Departments of Anatomy, Rehabilitation Medicine and Psychiatry. His perseverance and fortitude were instrumental in securing the funds for the construction of the Center for Rehabilitation Medicine on the Emory campus. He returned to McMaster University in 1977 where he worked continuously as Professor and Director of Rehabilitation Medicine Programs beyond his retirement in 1986.

Perhaps the memory that will endure well beyond the proclamations and professional accolades will be that of the man... who always had time to inspire and motivate those who were fortunate to meet him or even more fortunate to have worked with him. He often referred to his graduate students as “doc” mostly to inspire us toward our goals, especially when we felt overwhelmed by our studies. He took time to know our families and to tell all who would listen how very proud he was of his colleagues, especially those whose presence he graced every day. His passion for science was contagious; his work ethic extraordinary. He was most proud of his children Haig, Sally and Nancy and his remarkable wife, Dora, whose demeanor, frankness, dry sense of humor and perspective helped keep John remarkably grounded, or, if you will, “in place”. His support for me and continuous inquiry into my “doings” persisted well beyond his retirement. We have all lost a remarkable scholar and human being. Personally, I have lost a surrogate father. His written words, scribed by intellect and nurtured by wisdom, will live on.

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