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Historical Review

Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of the American Society for Photobiology (1972–1997)*

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It is exciting to realize that the American Society for Photobiology (ASP) is 25 years old. I won't trouble you with all of the early history, but a few highlights and comments might be of interest. When I began studying the photochemistry of the nucleic acids, I didn't know much about photobiology and didn't know many photobiologists. I thought that it would be rewarding to get together with other photobiologists in the San Francisco Bay Area, so in 1962 I started the Northern California Photobiology and Photochemistry Group (1962–1974). Those of us who could get away from work early had dinner at a local restaurant and then moved to a classroom at Stanford for the lecture.

I learned two very important lessons during the several years that I ran this group: (1) Don't expect a lot of help in running a group. (2) If you organize a meeting and send out the announcements, people will come. These two lessons would later give me the courage to start ASP in the face of considerable opposition.

The Northeast Photobiology Group was started in 1967, with Farrington Daniels, Jr. as its first President. Failing to find a suitable home, this group only met for 3 years (1967–1970). John Jagger started the South Central Photobiology Group in 1969. It met for 8 years (1969–1977).

In 1969, the Biophysical Society modified its bylaws to permit the formation of specialized subgroups, so I started the Photochemistry and Photobiology Subgroup of the Biophysical Society (1970–1978). We met the day before the regular meeting began. This group was very successful and continued for several years after ASP was started.

The only other photobiology group in the U.S. at that time was the Committee on Photobiology of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences (1952–1981). This Committee was started in 1952 to serve as the U.S. Section of the International Association for Photobiology (AIP). The Committee on Photobiology was responsible for raising travel money for U.S. scientists to attend AIP meetings and also hosted the AIP meeting at Dartmouth in 1968.

When I became Chairman of this Committee in 1970, it was totally out of grant funds. I finally found that our Committee was due money for one meeting a year from the Office of the Foreign Secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, but I had trouble getting the Division of Biology and Agriculture of the National Research Council to accept this money on our behalf. There were a lot of other administrative road blocks put in my way, so I went to talk to Dr. Philip Handler, then President of the National Academy of Sciences. He agreed that my requests were reasonable and proper and said that he would see to it that the administrative obstacles were removed, and he also helped me obtain a travel grant for the Committee from the National Science Foundation.

It now seemed as if we could really start doing something for photobiology other than just coordinating U.S. activities for AIP meetings. However, I was wrong! Many of the administrative obstacles were not removed, so it became very clear to me that if we wanted to advance photobiology in the U.S., we would have to get out of the National Research Council and start our own society.

However, the Committee members were almost unanimous in their lack of interest in starting a photobiology society. One member even referred to photobiology in 1971 as a "non-field," and other members agreed. In order to overcome such negative feeling about photobiology, I had to perform a considerable amount of "missionary work" about the benefits of forming a photobiology society. The argument was quite simple. Photobiologists were orphans in other societies, such as plant physiology, chemistry, biophysics, etc. and needed a home of their own.

In April of 1972, I brought up the topic again at a meeting of the Committee on Photobiology, and this time a motion was made and seconded to start a society. We were on our way! Next came the practical problems of naming the society, organizing the society, writing the constitution and bylaws, incorporating the society, funding the society, designing a logo, and organizing the first national meeting, which was held in Sarasota, Florida in June of 1973.

Again there wasn't an overabundance of help, but I already knew about this problem from my experience with the

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Northern California Group, and also the fact that if you organize a meeting, people will come. Although Richard Burk was hired as our part-time Executive Secretary, because of a previous commitment, he was unable to help with the Sarasota meeting, except for printing the Program and Abstracts. John Ott volunteered to be the local arrangements chairman and raised some money from his friends. I was able to raise $10,000 from the Department of Transportation because of my involvement in the early days with the ozone problem, and I also persuaded a number of companies to become sustaining members or donors.

Things were looking good! We were going to meet at a newly renovated hotel out on a beautiful beach, but 2 months before our meeting was to start, the hotel company went bankrupt. We ruled out holding the meeting in downtown Sarasota, because it is just like any other downtown and is miles from the beach. There was a very run down private club on the beach that a hotel chain had just bought with the idea of remodeling. John Ott and I talked them into opening the club as is for our meeting, which they did. Just to show you how primitive the accommodations were, Congressman Rogers from Florida, who was going to speak at our opening ceremonies, checked into his suite, which I presume was like mine, a bedroom and a sitting room with torn rugs and old furniture, and immediately checked out and into a hotel in town. He then sent a bill to me for over $200. Twenty-five years ago, $200 would get you a very nice room.

We had no money for professional projectionists, so every morning I set up the projectors and asked people attending each session to show the slides.

Although our accommodations left something to be desired, we had our meeting, and we had the beach. There were 240 registrants, 124 contributed papers, 8 symposia, 4 schools, and 6 lectures. The meeting was small enough so that everybody pretty much got to meet everybody. Furthermore, there weren't enough papers on each subspecialty of photobiology to keep everyone busy in their specialty, and you can't swim all the time, and we were miles from town, so people attended lectures that weren't in their field, and talked to people who weren't in their specialty, and they learned a lot. In fact, one of the major achievements of this meeting was that it served as the catalyst for the birth of molecular photodermatology. The dermatologists outlined the problems that they wanted to solve, and the chemists said that they knew how to solve these problems. Many scientific collaborations were started at the Sarasota meeting.

Now that the ASP meetings are much larger, it is hard to achieve this same level of personal interaction and scientific cross-fertilization, but it should be the goal of each of us to meet new people during an annual meeting, and to attend scientific sessions that are not in our specialty.

With all of the negative predictions about the success of ASP, I knew that I had to raise a lot of money to keep it going. While sitting on my deck at Stanford sipping a gin and tonic, Captain Maxwell of Pergamon Press agreed to give the journal, *Photochemistry and Photobiology,* to me for the Society. It is still a mystery to me why he would grant my outrageous request. Maybe he knew that I would start a new journal if he didn't, or maybe he just wanted to help. Anyway, ASP owes Captain Maxwell a great debt of gratitude.

The other officers for the first meeting of ASP were: Vice-President, Angelo Lamola; Secretary, Edwin Abrahamson; and Treasurer, Leo Vernon. The Editor was John Jagger, and the Councilors were Karl Norris, Claude Rupert, Tom Sisson, John Spikes, Beatrice Sweeney and Fred Urbach.

I was again President for the second ASP meeting. The third President was John Spikes, who was followed by Jack Myers, Angelo Lamola, Frederick Urbach, Jim Longworth, Beatrice Sweeney, Howard Seliger, Govindjee, Norman Krinsky, John Jagger, Walter Shropshire, Jr., Paul Loach, Irene Kochevar, Leonard Grossweiner, Christopher Foote, Thomas Coohill, Micheline Mathews-Roth, John Hearst, Meyrick Peak, Michael Rodgers, Nicholas Geacintov, Albert Girotti and Frank Gasparro.

Some major policy changes have occurred in ASP in the last 10 years.

1. The duties of the President-Elect and of the Past-President have essentially been exchanged. That is, the President-Elect is no longer faced immediately with the burden of organizing the scientific program for the annual meeting and therefore has time to learn more about the inner workings of the Society, so as to become a better President. Along with other duties, the Past-President, with a better understanding of the goals of the Society, now organizes the scientific program for the annual meeting.

2. The Council has been reorganized to be smaller and with fewer scientific categories. Originally there were 14 scientific categories, namely, Phototechnology, Spectroscopy, Photochemistry, Photosensitization, Ultraviolet Radiation Effects, Environmental Photobiology, Photomedicine, Chronobiology, Extraretinal Photoreception, Vision, Photomorphogenesis, Photomovement, Photosynthesis, and Bioluminescence. Now there are only five categories: (1) Photochemistry, Photophysics and Phototechnology, (2) Photosensory Biology, (3) Photosynthesis and Photoconversion, (4) Photomedicine and (5) Environmental Photobiology and Ultraviolet Radiation Effects.

The lumping together of several of the original scientific categories into one category first started with the journal, *Photochemistry and Photobiology,* as a way of grouping papers in the table of contents. Subsequently, this concept was used by the Program Committee for the annual meeting and ultimately, Council and the Society were reorganized along the same lines.

One hopes that this combining of scientific categories will not discourage those ASP members who work in fields that have only a few members, and will not inhibit the initiation of new subspecialties in ASP as the science of photobiology progresses in the future. The Society needs to make certain that the welcome mat is always out for new and sometimes controversial areas of photobiology. To borrow a phrase from Jesse Jackson, ASP "should be inclusive and not exclusive."

3. In 1996, the Photobiology Foundation was established. Its first goal is to raise money so that it can fulfill its long-term goals, i.e., to promote the science of photobiology through education and the support of research, and to increase the public awareness of the unique importance of the

science of photobiology to public health matters and to the environment.

4. Another major innovation has been the establishment of Photobiology OnLine (POL), a site on the World Wide Web for photobiology. This has been a joint effort of Dennis Valenzeno of ASP and Tamas Vidoczy of the European Society for Photobiology (ESP). As more people join the Internet, Photobiology OnLine should become a major force in publicizing the science of photobiology and for uniting photobiologists all over the world.

5. From 1981 to 1986, in cooperation with the Biophysical Society, ASP sponsored a Congressional Fellow. This was an innovative way to make information on photobiology available to Congress. Perhaps the revitalization of this program should be a goal of the Photobiology Foundation.

6. Another important avenue for disseminating information about photobiology has been the Sigma Xi National Lecturer program, which ASP joined in 1984. I hope that this program will continue.

These are exciting innovations, but what about the future?

1. The last edition of my textbook, *The Science of Photobiology,* was published in 1989. A new textbook for photobiology is long over due. ASP should copyright and publish this textbook and other books. By advertising through ASP and ESP, most of the photobiologists in the world will be contacted. The books should be sold through the Office of the Secretariat, so that ASP retains the profits.

There is nothing magical about publishing a book. Once the manuscripts are in hand, it is no trick to get a printer to print a book. There is no need to go though a publisher. Publishers don't know as much about selling photobiology books as photobiologists do. The publication of books is another way for ASP to counteract the financial shortfall caused by the reduction in library subscriptions to *Photochemistry and Photobiology* (see below).

2. The Nominations Committee, the most important committee in ASP, should maintain a permanent list of those people who have demonstrated their willingness to spend time and effort in a timely manner on behalf of ASP, and nominations should come from this list. People should not be nominated just because they are famous scientists, or good drinking buddies. In fact, ASP should have a "farm system," like they do in baseball, to train future officers and councilors. Young members of ASP should be given responsibilities on committees and other duties, to test their abilities and their willingness to work hard for ASP. Grooming young members to become the leaders of the future should be a top priority for ASP.

3. Every organization needs to continually guard against the loss of Institutional Memory. About 15 years ago, suddenly there were no longer any members of Council who were involved in starting ASP, and nobody knew what the Officers, Councilors and Committees were supposed to do. I was called out of retirement to write a handbook describing their duties. This handbook is now revised occasionally by ASP, which should guard against the loss of Institutional Memory in the future.

4. Another problem that every society needs to guard against is allowing the officers to turn over their duties and responsibilities to the Executive Secretary. This situation almost destroyed ASP a few years ago.

The creation of the Office of the Executive Secretary was not intended to eliminate the duties and responsibilities of the elected Secretary, Treasurer and other officers; rather it was to give the officers some help so that they could perform their duties and fulfill their responsibilities in a manner superior to what they could do in the absence of such help.

People don't expect their secretaries at the university to give their lectures or do their research, so why should officers expect the Executive Secretary of ASP to do their jobs for them.

5. A perennial problem is the survival of our Journal. As budgets are cut, libraries are cutting back on their subscriptions to what they consider to be secondary journals. Furthermore, many of our own members do not publish their best papers in *Photochemistry and Photobiology,* and the scientific impact rating of the Journal suffers. I don't know the solution, but I think that I know the cause. It is related to another problem facing ASP, "The Second Society Syndrome" (see below).

5. The Second Society Syndrome, a phrase coined by Frank Gasparro, is not only holding back our Journal, but also our Society. In a talk at the AIP Congress in Strasbourg in 1980, I was very optimistic about the future of photobiology, but I stated that the science of photobiology cannot be considered to have matured until you can stop a person in the hall at a photobiology meeting and ask them what they are, and they immediately reply "I am a photobiologist."

Unfortunately even today, the answer one obtains most often is not "photobiologist," but rather it is the scientific discipline of the university department that hires them, or the discipline in which they obtained their Ph.D. or M.D. Relevant to the Journal problem, these same people also tend to publish their best papers in a journal in the scientific discipline of the university department that hires them, or the discipline in which they obtained their Ph.D. or M.D. If the Photobiology Foundation is successful in obtaining money for research, perhaps the recipients of such research awards may be more inclined to say "I am a photobiologist." A solution to The Second Society Syndrome should be one of the top priorities of ASP.

I am pleased to have played a part in the formation of ASP, and it is especially pleasing to see how successful ASP is in its 25th year, thanks to the hard work of many dedicated people. I trust that it will be even more successful during the next 25 years.