



In Memoriam

Ronald S. Wilson
1933-1986

As I read the message on my desk that Wednesday afternoon of a very sad November, I just couldn't believe it. I quickly thought of a misunderstanding, perhaps out of language problems. A wishful thinking, I immediately realized: the message was too clearcut, unmistakable, and the telephone call from Louisville had been taken by a British research assistant here at the Mendel Institute.

And yet, it still was so hard to believe. Only a few weeks before, Ron was with us in Amsterdam and he appeared as healthy and brilliant as usual. He generously contributed to all of our meetings, and he and I sat a long time together discussing future plans for our Society. That had become a tradition for us, started in Rome at our first congress in 1974, and continued over the years at our Washington, Jerusalem and London congresses, as well as to other meetings in Louisville and Rome, where he and I occasionally exchanged visits.

Ron's prominent role in twin research, along with his interest in human relations, particularly at the international level, and his readiness in collaborating to efforts he considered to be of value, had made him a constant reference point for all of our activities. As a member of the Editorial Board of this journal, he contributed highly valuable manuscripts, stimulated interest, and reviewed, anonymously and generously, a great number of manuscripts, always in the most constructive way. A Vice President of our International Society in the term, 1981-1983, he also served as Chairman of the Program Committee for our 1983 Congress (London) and was currently serving for the second term as Chairman of our Membership Committee. He was a most obvious candidate to the Presidency and he was to organize some future congress of the Society in the USA.

Born in 1933, Ronald S. Wilson received his Ph.D. in Psychology at Yale University in 1959. He started his professoral career in Iowa, and then moved to the University of Louisville School of Medicine, where he became full professor in 1971. Under his direction, since 1967 and for twenty years, the Louisville Twin Study became famous worldwide, producing unique information and insights into the timing and processes of human growth and develop-

ment, based on repeated measures of some twenty physical and mental traits of a total number of about 1000 pairs of twins followed longitudinally for some fifteen years. Over that period, Dr Wilson succeeded in getting over US \$ 3 million in grants and produced some 80 publications, a number of which have become classics in the field.

The unique value of his research was widely acknowledged. His many honors included the Socio-Psychological Prize of the American Association of Science in 1979, and the James Shields Award for outstanding research with twins in the field of behavior genetics, received at our Jerusalem congress in 1980. In 1986 he was elected President of the Behavior Genetics Association. In that same year, only a few months before his untimely death, his research program was commended to the University of Louisville Board of Trustees and received a Citation.

Ron was a brilliant scientist, a generous and highly dependable colleague, one of the strongest assets of our Society. More than that, he was a gentle soul, and a very dear friend. As I think of his still young life so suddenly come to an end, and of the great loss that this represents to our society and to many of us individually, it occurs to me that he had already accomplished so much that there was perhaps little left for him to achieve in life. So, after all, he is just continuing to be ahead of us, as he used to be.

Paolo Parisi

From the Mendel Institute in Rome, April 1987

Ron Wilson and 'spurts and lags' in behavioural development

To those not involved in longitudinal studies, it may seem a strange epitaph to Ron to say that he will be best remembered for his unique contribution to our understanding of spurts and lags in developments. As Ron followed 'his' twins in the Louisville Twin Study, he became aware that the fluctuations within each child from one testing session to another were not random but followed a pattern which he demonstrated was itself partly under genetic control. Ron pursued this result in many ways, by studying the younger siblings of the twin, by seeing how it related to fluctuations in physical growth in general and between those twins very different in birthweight, etc.

Longitudinal researchers are indebted to Ron in three ways for his fresh approach to this field. The first two are straightforwardly scientific. First, he showed that there is more to development than just the closer approximation to adult performance and that the deviations along the way can be of importance. Second, and something for which all psychologists should be grateful, he demolished the myth that fluctuations in score from one time to the next are just random effects, showing only how bad our measures are at providing consistent estimates of ability.

Thirdly, it is what it takes to collect the necessary data that makes 'spurts and lags' such a fitting phrase to epitomise Ron's career. He showed us that the *only* way is a longitudinal study of the same twins throughout their childhood: there are no shortcuts, no alternatives to twins and their siblings. Not only did Ron affirm the unique importance of twins in developmental studies, he also showed us practically how to go about it. It is not easy to keep families motivated in research year after year. Building on Steve Vandenberg's work at the start of the Louisville Twin Study, Ron demonstrated the way to make them 'his' twins through interest in the families, provision of information to them, and all the other things that go to

making people feel more than just 'subjects' in research.

I first met Ron at the 1977 Behavior Genetics Association meeting in Louisville, when we were just contemplating the LaTrobe Twin Study. His advice and encouragement then and ever since about how to develop and maintain the study have been invaluable. The outcome of his generous assistance to myself and to others entering the field is that Ron's passing will be mourned not only by his family, friends and fellow scientists, but by many multiple birth families throughout the world. Some will know Ron directly via the Louisville Twin Study, but many more know him only indirectly. They may not even be familiar with his name but through being part of the other developmental twin studies influenced by Ron, they have benefited through his innovative and humanitarian approach to twin children.

David A. Hay
LaTrobe Twin Study
Department of Psychology,
LaTrobe University, Bundoora,
Victoria, Australia

Mementos

Dr. Ronald S. Wilson, Director of the Louisville Twin Study, Kentucky, a Founding Fellow, past Vice President and current Chairman of the Membership Committee of ISTS, suddenly died from a heart attack on November 16, 1986.

At the last Congress of our Society in Amsterdam, Dr. Wilson contributed to the first plenary session describing "A new method for representing mental growth". In his own dignified style he presented data of his unique and large sample of twins followed since birth for almost 20 years. Then, during the meeting of the Board of Directors of ISTS, he enthusiastically joined in the discussion on the future of our Society. None of us could divine that it was to be Ron's last Congress. We will miss his excellent contributions to developmental behavior genetics, in which field he was one of the world's leading scientists. His death leaves a blank for many of us. The memory of a staunch friend, an enthusiastic scientist, and a pillar of our Society will never leave us.

Aldur W. Eriksson
President, International Society for Twin Studies;
Institute of Human Genetics,
Free University of Amsterdam

You should also know how important our International Society was to Ron. He and I were together for almost seventeen years. During that time we developed and shared an enthusiasm for looking at the historical roots of ideas. You cannot imagine his first and continued excitement about being part of an International Society whose roots included Rome and Jerusalem! The Society was a focal point of his perspective of the international spirit of science, and in his role as chairman of the membership committee, he was delighted to see the Society become increasingly representative of all points of the world.

Ron's contributions to the Society, as well as to the endeavors of the Louisville Twin

Study, were pragmatic. He never liked to take an idea too far beyond its source. His own research depended on and added to the basics: in the data, or analyses, or interpretation. In his view, the basics of research and the roots of the idea for research were intertwined. Perhaps for that reason, he admired a Society that fostered both.

Adam P. Matheny, Jr.
Louisville Twin Study

I was shocked and desolated to hear about Ron Wilson's sudden death. It is a great loss for us all, as well as for the Society. He was a rare combination of generosity and warmth that is seldom found in the academic world, as well as outside of it. Always interested in other human beings, he offered support and stimulation whenever it was asked for.

I sincerely hope that we can continue our work in the Society, in the spirit of mutual understanding and comradeship that was a characteristic feature of Ron's work and life.

Siv Fischbein
Stockholm Institute of Education

I am shocked to learn the sad and untimely demise of Dr. Ronald S. Wilson. It is indeed unbelievable that such a healthy and handsome individual will be removed from amongst us so suddenly.

I had met Dr Wilson first in Washington in 1977 and later in 1983 at iSTS Conferences. We had the opportunity of exchanging letters and research news and views on child growth and development. I found him always too willing to help me out of problems. He has also inspired me to undertake research on nature-nurture problems of child growth and development.

In the death of Dr. Wilson we have lost a sympathizer of ISTS and an excellent researcher in the field of twin studies and physical growth and development which will be difficult to replenish. Through these lines I wish to pay my humble tributes to his services to the world of science and to humanity at large. I pray to Almighty to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to the family to bear this irreparable loss.

J.C. Sharma
Department of Anthropology,
Panjab University,
Chandigarh, India

Ronald Wilson has left us, too early. His contribution to behavioral genetics is beyond dispute. His time and manpower consuming longitudinal twin study on the mental development, starting in 1957, is a milestone in behavioral genetics. Several publications for that study are citation classics now.

Ron Wilson followed twins and their younger siblings on several tests from birth through to 9 years with a test again at 15 years and demonstrated very elegantly that the MZ-DZ distinction becomes more and more clear the older the children grow. Wilson's conclusion, that '...developmental processes are initiated and guided by timed gene-action systems which are activated in sequential fashion, and on a schedule largely determined by the genotype...', is now generally accepted.

His decease, still in the strength of his life, is a loss for psychology in general and for behavioral genetics more specifically. Our feelings of grief accompany his family and his colleagues.

Jacobus F. Orlebeke
Department of Experimental Psychology
Free University of Amsterdam

Several years ago, I submitted a research paper to a child development journal for publication. The journal editor forwarded copies of the manuscript to three experts in the field for review. I later received the three reviews, but immediately recognized one as being from Ron Wilson! Dr. Wilson used a very distinctive style of typing that was easy to identify. The editor asked me to respond to each of the reviews. In my response to the editor, I suggested that Ron Wilson might change his typing because it was easy to recognize and, as such, destroyed the intended anonymity of the reviews. My edited manuscript was again circulated among the same reviewers. Ron Wilson typed his response (using the *same* typewriter), and concluded, "Since Nancy recognized my typing, I'll just sign my name and hope she doesn't recognize my handwriting!".

Dr. Ronald S. Wilson was a fine researcher and a marvelous human being. I will miss him.

Nancy L. Segal
Minnesota Center for Twin and Adoption Research
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Dr. Ronald Wilson for all his fame and brilliance, was a genuine, caring friend who was never too busy to help with a word of encouragement. His death is deeply felt by all of us whose lives he touched and the inspiration he gave will be reflected for years to come.

Joyce E. Maxey
Past Vice President/Collective Members
International Society for Twin Studies,
Marion, Iowa