

Emile Berger (1926-2005)

Born in Cernowitz, Province of Bukowina, border town between Hungary, Rumania and Soviet Union (present day Ukraine), Dr. Emile Berger grew up in a multicultural environment, then moved to Vienna (Austria) where his



father was Professor and Chairman of the Department of Urology. During the troubled period of the Second World War he was persecuted by the Nazi Regime. He completed his medical school in Geneva, Switzerland then migrated to Canada in 1952. He obtained his neurosurgical training at the Montreal Neurological Institute under Penfield, Cone and Elvidge and established in 1960 the Neurosurgical Service

at Hôpital Jean Talon where he acted for more than 30 years. In the early sixties, he pioneered the use of the operating microscope for clipping of aneurysms and was also one of the first to perform intra-operative angiography to verify the aneurysmal ligation. He was one of the rare neurosurgeons qualified in electroencephalography and was active for many years at the Quebec Workman's Compensation and at the Quebec Association of Expert Physicians. For 15 years he was Flight Surgeon in the Reserve Corps of the Royal Canadian Air Force and was granted the rank of Honorary Colonel. At a stage where the majority would have retired, Dr. Berger started a "second career" as a Senior Associate member in the Division of Neurosurgery, Sir Mortimer B. Davis – Jewish General Hospital where he rendered for 15 years considerable services within the outpatient department, the clinical unit, the operating room and the Pain Clinic. His recent review of 1,000 cases of "failed backs" was presented at multiple international meetings and shed

some realistic light upon the long term results of lumbar discectomy in patients with work-related accidents.¹ He also had an interest in topics related to neurosciences medical history.² In 2002, always seeking new challenges, he enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Cognitive Neurosciences at McGill University on the subject "Functional Neuroimaging in Alzheimer's and related neuro-degenerative diseases."

Extremely modest, Dr. Berger, who spoke seven languages, possessed a wide culture and his extracurricular activities, besides his family and his work, were multiple: aged more than 70, he earned an academic degree at McGill Faculty of Arts and Sciences, German Studies, on subjects such as "Political Aspects and Cultural Discrimination in Richard Wagner's operas" and "German Mythology in Richard Wagner's Ring." He frequently published contributions to "Reader's Corner" in the Montreal Gazette on various subjects such as Grammar, History, Discrimination and the sharpness of his written statements was much in contrast with his soft-spoken language. As a musician, he mastered the trumpet, trombone, accordion and piano and was also a free time sculptor, mostly depicting busts of mature men out of his imagination. As an indefatigable worker dedicated to his patients, he continued to work until he was struck by a brief but devastating disease to which he succumbed after a courageous fight on May 20, 2005. Due to his warm personality and his philosophical approach to life, he was unanimously appreciated and he will be dearly missed by his colleagues and co-workers. He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Ruth Berger, whom he married in 1956, his two children Claire and David, and six grandchildren.

- 1 Berger, E. Late post operative results in 1,000 work-related lumbar spine conditions. *Surg. Neurol* 2000; 54: 101-108
2. Berger, E. Karl Ludwig von Habsburg (1771-1847): Field-Marshal and Archduke of Austria; A great strategist, military commander and . . . epileptic. *Proceedings of the 6th European Congress on Epileptology Vienna, Austria, May 30th -June 3rd, 2004.*