



## **Dr. William Feindel, 1918-2014, Remembrances**

By Rolando Del Maestro

**“What a man leaves after him are the dreams that his name inspires and the works that make his name a symbol of admiration” Paul Valéry (French Poet)**

The Board of Curators of the Osler Library Meeting was scheduled for November 6, 2013 and for the first time in many decades Dr. William Feindel would not be present to add his wisdom to the proceedings. Dr.

Feindel had been admitted to the Royal Victoria Hospital and was scheduled for the implantation of a pacemaker on the same day as the Curators' meeting. Since Dr. Feindel would not be present to provide his reports as the Curator of the Penfield Archive and the Chairman of the Publications Committee, he had asked me to give his carefully prepared ones. I decided to visit him the day before the meeting and to get his opinion related to a number of key issues. As a member of the Standing Committee of the Osler Library, Dr. Feindel had been instrumental in producing some important ideas related to the future of the Osler Library of the History of Medicine.

On entering Dr. Feindel's hospital room he was sitting up in his bed, appearing a bit thinner, but he quickly greeted me with his usual laugh and broad smile. As always, we had a wonderful conversation filled with humour, delightful discussion and measured thought. I had another meeting to attend, so after more than an hour, I begged his forgiveness to leave and told him I would be back the day after the Curators' meeting to bring him up to date on the discussions. As I reached his hospital room door he said softly - almost in a whisper "I have to go on renal dialysis." I quietly returned to my chair as he followed my sad movements with his piercing eyes.

Outlining his typical approach to life he delineated that he was more than up for the challenge, just as he had tackled all the challenges that he had faced in the past. He was ready with both resolve and humour for the battle ahead. He stated that the alternative to not having renal dialysis was not very appealing. Being human involves courage, and Dr. Feindel was certainly not without courage. He mentioned that numerous individuals had been on dialysis for decades and had been able to carry on without difficulty - as would he. Being physicians, we both knew that at his age, 95, there were difficulties ahead and that certain storms could not be weathered. We both understood, without saying, that a door was being opened and when and how it would close was unclear. I reflected on our 30 year relationship as I walked back through the Royal Victoria Hospital and across the bridge to the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital.

As a neurosurgical resident at Western University, I was well aware of the work that Dr. Penfield and Dr. Feindel had carried out related to the surgery of epilepsy and tumors. On my return to Western University after having finished my PhD, Dr. Feindel, then the Director of the 'Neuro,' asked me to give a lecture at the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital. I gave a talk on oxidative enzymes in glial tumours and Dr. Feindel peppered me with difficult questions related to the oxidative metabolism of brain tumours.

I thus learned very early that focused and relevant questions were his quintessential trademark. At a dinner meeting with Dr. Feindel and Dr. Bertrand, the Head of the Department of Neurosurgery, Dr. Feindel discussed the plan for the development of brain tumour research at the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital and inquired if I would be willing to join the researchers at the Institute. Although honoured by his suggestion, I had just begun my studies in the Brain Tumour Research Laboratory at Western and I did not feel this was the best time for me to move. In the ensuing years I was keenly interested in Dr. Feindel's research and was aware of his continuing contributions related to neurosurgery and the history of medicine. His large collection of books involving medical history focused on his hero, Thomas Willis. He told me at one time that he had an open account with a number of London, England booksellers in which he agreed to buy any books on Willis they could find - a passionate collector indeed. Using the extensive resources of his library and that of the Osler he wrote the first biography of Willis and produced a beautiful reproduction of Willis' famous *Anatomy of the Brain*.

In 1999, Dr. Richard Murphy, the Director of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital asked me for input on the development of a Brain Tumour Research Centre to be housed in a new building at the Institute. Dr. Feindel had taken a keen interest in the development of the Centre and in my recruitment to it. Aware of my interest in Leonardo da Vinci and the history of medicine, Dr. Feindel along with Pamela Miller, the Osler Librarian, organized a special exhibition for me of the books that Dr. William Osler had collected related to Leonardo. I remember spending a remarkable afternoon with Dr. Feindel and Mrs. Miller leafing through these Leonardo volumes and visiting the amazing Osler Library. In the evening, Dr. Feindel asked my wife Pam and me to the University Club and there he helped convince us that McGill University, and the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital along with the Osler Library was in our future. His support and encouragement was critical to my decision to come to Montreal.

Soon after arriving in Montreal I moved into Dr. Feindel's previous office and in a very short time became acutely aware of the role that Dr. Feindel had and continued to have on maintaining the intellectual vigour and culture at the Institution. I knew that Dr. Feindel had received numerous honours and felt that he should be considered for the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. In the spring of 2002 I discussed this with him and asked him to provide me with a summary of what he felt were the important contributions

and accomplishments of his career. In Dr. Feindel's typical manner he provided me with a short one page document that listed his accomplishments under the headings of *Epilepsy*, *Brain Imaging*, and the *History of Neurosciences*. It is interesting that his list included more contributions to the *History of Neurosciences* than in any other area. In June 2002 Dr. Abe Fuks, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at McGill and myself nominated Dr. Feindel for the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame under the areas of *Epilepsy*, *Brain Imaging*, and the *History of Neurosciences* and as a "Builder" of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital as its Director from 1972-1984. He was honoured as an Inductee to the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame in 2003 and at that time he and his wife, Faith, asked my wife, Pam, and me to join him at his table for the induction ceremonies.

I was honoured to be named the William Feindel Professor of Neuro-Oncology in 2004. Dr. Feindel and I spent many stimulating hours discussing brain tumour clinical care and brain tumour research. Dr. Feindel always had a deep interest in acquiring new knowledge and understanding new technologies as they were developed. At Neurosurgical Rounds and at multiple conferences at the 'Neuro' he would frequently have a small black book where he would write notes and questions related to the issues being discussed. His questions continued to be direct and focused during and after presentations and speakers knew they were about to be tested if Dr. Feindel opened his book to ask a question. Time had only improved his ability to distill the essence of a presentation.

The sharpness of mind was epic. I frequently asked his opinion on my writing. One of many examples comes to mind. I asked Dr. Feindel for his opinion of my draft for a review of Michael Bliss's book on Harvey Cushing. He took the time to review it carefully and pointed out in large black marker that I had misspelled the name of Dr. Cushing's collaborator, Dr. Louise Eisenhardt.

I was more than honoured that Dr. Feindel was one of the speakers at the get-together in 2012 when I retired from clinical practice. The very first thing he said in his speech was that he would never retire: the word was just not in his vocabulary. At that time he gave me a book by Wilder Penfield called *The Second Career*. It is inscribed "*This book came from the Library of Wilder Penfield which he bequested to Theodore Rasmussen and William Feindel. The latter now passes it on to Rolando Del Maestro on his "RETIREMENT"*". On the opposite page he wrote in bold letters "*To Rolando*

*with all best wishes for a rewarding II Career/ in admiration from your friend and colleague in Osler. Bill Feindel*” This is a treasure to be passed on with willing hands at the future time.

The last time I saw him was on December 17<sup>th</sup> during the launch for his new book *Images of the Neuro* at which time he gave a Power Point presentation on the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital, his recent book and what was to come next. Dr Feindel was a “Man of the Book” and the ink of knowledge flowed in his veins.

### The Legacy

Dr. Feindel’s publications, teachings, and lectures have disseminated information on the surgical treatment of temporal lobe seizures across the globe. Because of his exquisite skill in dealing with these complicated neurosurgical problems, many visiting surgeons from around the world have come to learn from him. Along with these surgeons, his many Residents and Fellows have imbibed the knowledge he imparted and this has been passed on as part of his legacy throughout the world. His demonstrations of the value of brain imaging continue to have a daily impact on the lives of patients with neurological disease. Many of the developments and accomplishments of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital over the last 60 years can be directly related to his initiatives and vision. Each day in the operating rooms throughout the world the challenge of epilepsy and brain tumours are faced anew and as neurosurgeons look down their operating microscopes they are buffeted by the knowledge that Dr. Feindel has imparted and I am sure they can feel the soft touch of his gentle fingers on their shoulder.

As promised I visited him in hospital the day after he had his successful pacemaker operation and found him in high spirits. He commented that having a fully functional heart had its advantages. Responding I said that he had always had a heart full of function. I had brought along a copy of the Curators’ Medal that had been presented at the Osler Banquet to the medical student winner of the Curators’ prize. Chris Lyons the Osler Librarian and I had discussed awarding Dr. Feindel, at an upcoming ceremony, a special Curators’ Medal for all his contributions to the Osler Library.

Unfortunately this was not to be.

One cannot envision Dr. Feindel without the presence of his elegant wife, Faith. She was a constant presence at his side, glowing with her enduring love and support. I never attended a function, and there were many, where she was not his steadfast companion. Theirs was indeed a partnership to envy.

Dr. Feindel's passing is a very great loss to his wife Faith, his family and many friends, McGill, The Osler Library, Canada and the World. The world will not have another man with the unique qualities of Dr. Feindel. He was truly a Man of Substance.

In my opinion, Dr. Feindel was happiest while in the Osler Library and as the Honorary Osler Librarian. Surrounded by Dr. Osler's books and ashes, he felt in tune with the rhythm of the history of medicine and the slow but progressive advancement to eradicate disease and make the world a better place. On opening one of the many books by Thomas Willis that Dr. Feindel had donated to the Osler Library, one can feel the palpable and consuming interest of the intellect of humanity. Dr. Feindel had delved deeply into the human condition, understood its textures, nuances, and needs. He was a true Renaissance Man

It is indeed a great honour for me to have been the William Feindel Professor of Neuro-Oncology and to now be the William Feindel Professor Emeritus in Neuro-Oncology.

Dr. Feindel will be missed by all but especially by the books in the Osler library that will miss his watchful eye and careful touch.