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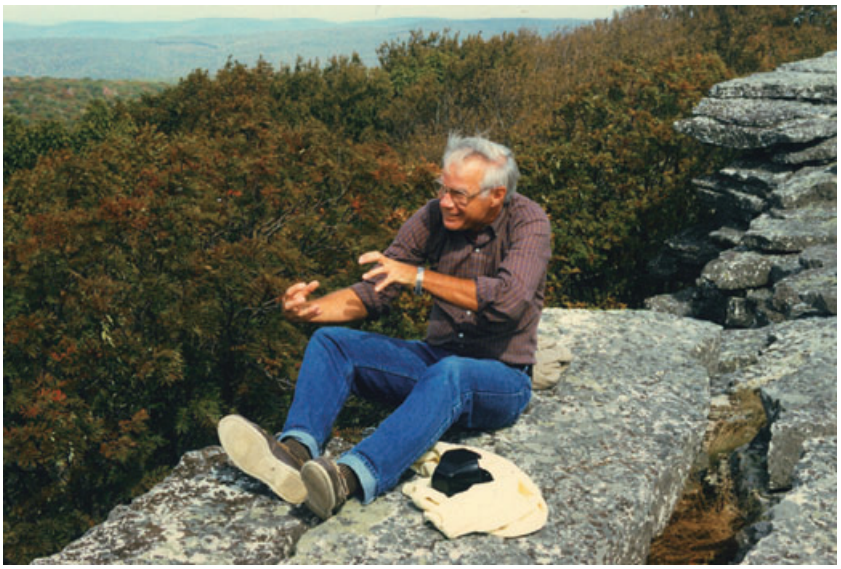
Obituary

Amos Oppenheim (31 October 1934 to 24 September 2006)



Even when relaxing, Amos was not above discussing experiments.

We remember our colleague and friend Amos Oppenheim who passed away last year. His many students, colleagues and friends will sorely miss him. His work in Israel and the legions of collaborations he had around the world were not only made possible by the love and intensity he brought to his scientific studies, but equally by his humour and conviviality. Amos was much respected and admired for his many original contributions to the studies of regulation of gene expression in bacteria and, in particular, to the study of phage Lambda. Understanding Lambda was his passion. His most recent work was directed towards extending the lambda paradigm as a model system for understanding regulatory networks. Indeed much of his most recent work on Systems Biology of Lambda is still in the process of being published by his co-workers. He also made significant contributions to the areas of the structure–function of macromolecules, gene expression in bacteria and its application to biotechnology, and the biological control of plant pathogens.

In 1966, Amos earned his PhD from the University of California at Davis, where he also received his undergraduate education, and soon after joined the Hebrew University Medical School, where he was a Professor and a mentor of many generations of scientists and medical students. He was a visiting research fellow with Francois Jacob at the Institut Pasteur, Paris for 2-month periods between 1968 and 1970, a visiting professor at the Institute of Cancer Research, Columbia University, New York (Summers 1986, 1990), and for over 30 years a frequent and a very fruitful Visiting Scientist at the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Maryland, the last time during 2005–2006. He was an organizer and invited participant at many international meetings. Among his other activities, Amos was the Head of Israeli National Node of European Molecular Biology Data Network Steering Committee, Head of Authority for Graduate Studies at the Hebrew University and Head of the Biotechnology Teaching Program at the Hebrew University.

His contributions to the Lambda field were many. In particular, his long-time studies on the action of the CII and CIII proteins, how they control the decision between lysis and lysogeny, and how FtsH and other proteases modulate the levels of CII and other phage proteins, are seminal contributions to our understanding of Lambda regulation. These studies, along with his connected interest in bacterial proteins including HU and IHF that affect λ transcription control, represent his major outstanding contributions to the field.

All who knew Amos will miss his probing intellect, love of experiments and, without a doubt, his infectious laugh and ebullient personality that always lit up the rooms he entered. Everyone loved working with Amos. He was always ready to sit down at the bench and start new experiments, and his enthusiastic hard work rubbed off on everyone. Collaborations were never a problem because his collaborators knew Amos would do more than his fair share of the experimental work and much of the thinking involved in designing the project and interpreting the results.

Amos' interests went beyond science; he loved classical music and was an accomplished amateur artist. Just as he strove to be at the top of his field in science, Amos also was driven in his outside pursuits to aim for the peak. Always an outdoors person, in his later years he enjoyed going on treks, not in his locale, but to the Himalayas and the Andes where he was tested on the highest peaks. Amos' last day was spent swimming and enjoying the seaside with his grandchildren.

Amos has been a loving husband, friend and colleague of 53 years to Ariella Oppenheim, also a scientist at the Hebrew University. Three sons Arik, Dudik, Yuval, eight grandchildren, and a brother, Danni Oppenheim, also survive Amos.

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