Beginning April 2010, the Journal of Neuroimmunology will have at its helm a new Editor-in-Chief, Michael K. Racke, whose charge it will be to lead us to new heights as clinical and molecular technologies continue to develop. For this departing (and yes, somewhat saddened) Editor-in-Chief, the inception, launching, and day-to-day running of our Journal has been an exciting journey, a journey shared for three decades with all who have contributed — authors, reviewers and readers alike. In science, sharing is what it is all about and sharing affects all tasks, the mundane and the scientific.

As a full-time bench scientist for my entire career, I vividly remember one of my most mundane duties occurring in 1962 when I was shown down to the empty basement of a Victorian terrace house in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, my laboratory for the next six years, and was told to prepare a list of whatever I needed for my research in multiple sclerosis and to get it to my mentor as soon as possible. It was an awesome, lonely task and with no one to share it, not very stimulating. Not surprisingly, I made some poor choices, but in the end, I did get there and I certainly learned from the experience. Oscar Wilde comes to mind, “Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes”. Thus, I became very experienced, very early on. With time, as I became academically established and published, I was able to share my experiences as a mentor with students and trainees, most of whom, I am gratified to note, have prospered, remained in the field, and are now among my closest associates.

In any scientific experiment, sharing occurs at all levels, from the spark of the idea to the appearance of the work in print. To share the steps involved with others (experimental design, interpretation of data, etc.), makes the results more meaningful, rewarding and credible. On the other hand, failure to share is anathema to most scientists and the root cause of many a rift. Like the time an animated Michael Oldstone in the early 1980s openly berated a colleague at an international gathering for not sharing reagents, his reasoning being that such behavior prevented others repeating and perhaps validating otherwise controversial observations. Interestingly enough, it was not long after this incident that the reagents in question became available — kudos to Michael, perhaps.
Eventually, the acquisition of personal experiences, a reputation from running an international research team and lessons learned from trainees, equipped this writer with a keen sensitivity and awareness of the needs and feelings of young investigators, which in turn stood me in good stead in 1980 when I added the Journal of Neuroimmunology to my journey. For me it was an epiphany. Fortunately, with a plethora of like-minded colleagues from around the world ready to share the task, each with a vested interest in giving Neuroimmunology an identity, I was never alone. Particularly comforting was the company of fellow colleagues from my home institution, Einstein, ready to help when snap decisions or expedited reviews were called for — people like Celia Brosnan (your current Deputy Editor), Sunhee Lee (now an Editorial Board member), and others too numerous to name. With time, as the field blossomed and as more trainees graduated and became independent, new recruits joined the task force and by 1987, the discipline was sufficiently well populated and strong to support a memorable international congress in Philadelphia where Neuroimmunology officially came into being. Also historically significant is that during this same gathering, the International Society for Neuroimmunology was inaugurated. The rest is history.

Turning now for a moment from Journal history to my laboratory, like any long journey, one tends to accumulate “stuff” along the way, material that eventually has to be unloaded or relocated as we move on to new pastures. In this regard and coincidental with passing the baton to Mike Racke, has been the gradual dismantling of 40 years’ worth of equipment and materials as I adjust to retirement and become accustomed to the title Professor Emeritus, a title for which I feel much too junior and ill-prepared. As fate would have it, I also find myself the last member of the great neuropathology group of Dr. Robert Terry, a pioneer in Alzheimer research, now a resident of California. Bob was the magnet behind my coming to New York City from the UK in 1968 and his Einstein team dominated World Neuropathology through the 1960s and 1970s. As members of his group moved on, I found myself inheriting more and more “stuff”. This all came to a head (no pun intended), when I began my retreat from almost 3000 ft² of laboratory space into a 300 ft² office, during which I have uncovered a treasure trove of scientific cornucopia, personal ephemera and items entrusted to me for safe-keeping. Before I take my leave, bear with me as I share some of this with you.

Pre-eminent among the agglomeration is a mass of microscopes — binocular, double-headed, dissecting and electron. Heavens, do I have microscopes! Having been formally trained by Zeiss, Philips and Siemens, having grown up with microscopes, and since people of my persuasion never discard microscopes, microscopes have tended to accumulate around me. On top of this, I am the proud owner of a large collection of antique microscopes at home and my wife would never agree to my bringing more into our house — like my beautiful 1976 vintage Zeiss Photomicroscope 3 (purchased with a cheque graciously sent to me by Dr. Robert Kroc of the McDonald’s hamburger family), or my 1963 JEM 30 Superscope, a mini-EM inherited from the late Alex Novikoff of lysosome fame. So forget about keeping microscopes, Dr. Raine — they’ll have to go!

Continuing down the same road, how does a retiring neuropathologist/neuroimmunologist dispose of record books, of which I have many drawers full? Like these ones looking at me, which belonged to the renowned Byron Waksman to whom this journal recently paid homage on the occasion of his 90th birthday (J. Neuroimmunol. 214, 3–24, 2009). Byron went through an episode similar to mine when he closed his laboratory at Yale in 1979 and moved to New York City to become Director of Research at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. He must have caught me at a weak moment when I agreed to accommodate his histology slides and record books, and I clearly remember a somewhat tearful Byron walking me through his collection one (very long) afternoon. The slides were eventually discarded but the notebooks, meticulously detailing his original experiments at Harvard and Yale on myelin, EAE and autoimmunity (initially with the late iconoclastic neurologist, Raymond Adams), live on with me. Maybe Byron would take them back? Even better, maybe he would like mine, too?

Particularly problematic has been the inventorying and culling of the contents of my many freezers. These housed a human brain bank (most specimens willed or donated by wonderful MS people to support my research), thousands of frozen sections on slides (prepared by my faithful technicians, Earl Swanson, Howard Finch and Miriam Pakingan, each with me for more than 35 years), and a rich collection of animal tissues, reagents and antibodies, all shared (that word again) for many years with trainees and colleagues around the world. Entering these freezers was something akin to opening a tomb — not quite the same league as Howard Carter in 1922 with Tutankhamun’s tomb, but something along those lines. Firstly, to access my material, I had to wade through layers of relics of generations of past graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. It is mind-boggling what trainees will squirrel away in a mentor’s freezers and how each of them will insist on hiding their individual collections! I did contact one ex-postdoc, now in Europe, who persuaded me to forward an accumulation of freezer “treasures” by FedEx. Over the next few days, ten large boxes of animal tissues on dry ice left Einstein (supposedly “to complete an unfinished project,” ha! ha!), and crossed the Atlantic, thus allowing me to delve deeper. Surprises and reminiscences continued to flow from my freezers in the form, for example, of a long-buried box of human sera from the first clinical trial on myelin basic protein (MBP) in MS. This came from Jonas Salk in 1978 who I had met earlier at a conference in Göttingen at which he presented the findings on his clinical trial and mentioned that the
sera from his MS patients possessed very high anti-MBP titers. Being ever-resourceful and opportunistic, I saw in these samples an ideal tool for probing the MS brain immunocytochemically with a myelin-specific human antiserum (remember, it was 1978, before monoclonal antibodies), and Jonas was more than willing to share them — along with prebleeds. However, with the advent of monoclonals shortly thereafter, the approach became passé — but for a moment in my quest to consolidate material, it was interesting to revisit this gift from a now-departed fellow sharer in science.

In another freezer, also making its first appearance for many years, were aliquots of purified, killed Mycobacterium tuberculosis (Lederle strain) dated September 5, 1946 by the great Jules Freund (of Freund’s adjuvant fame), sent in the 1970s by Sandy Stone at NIH, who trained under Dr. Freund. I remember testing this material and finding it exceedingly potent in the induction of severe, acute EAE. However, since our goal at that time was to develop a model of chronic relapsing EAE, it was of limited use. Also in the same freezer, were boxes of purified IgG from the sera and CSF of normal and MS subjects and patients with subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (a measles-related condition), ion exchange column-purified by Yours Truly — the product of a sabbatical at NIH in 1976 under the tutelage of a close friend, Dale McFarlin. During this visit to Washington, I became adept at purifying, fractionating and conjugating immunoglobulins, and when coupled to a chromogen, these molecules and their Fab₂ fragments made powerful probes for investigations on measles antigens in MS, measles virus being a major etiologic candidate in the 1970s. The joint sharing of human samples, skills and facilities between Einstein and the NIH allowed us to conclude, with the best tools available, that a role for measles in MS could not be supported.

So it goes on, stuff upon stuff, projects unfinished, work yet to be done — I suppose that’s why we have freezers? Like the as-yet-to-be-sectioned brain of a Hollywood socialite with MS who, unbeknownst to me, willed me her brain. This arrived a few days after her death, on dry ice, along with a note from the lawyer. Unfortunately, the pathologist performing the autopsy failed to slice the brain before shipment and it still sits in my freezer, intact. Since thawing would ruin the tissue for immunopathology (due to ice crystal formation), it remains frozen. Have you ever tried to slice a frozen brain? No small task, I can assure you. I could go on but the more one uncovers the past, the more one discovers how much remains to be done. It’s not as if I am having to close my laboratory peremptorily, I have had plenty of notice — it’s just that dismantling one’s home of many years is not the kind of project one wants to rush. Indeed, it’s enough to make one reconsider one’s decision to retire.

CSR’s technicians Howard Finch, Miriam Pakingan and Earl Swanson

Now, as we approach the final turn, not thinking too much about how the road has changed since those basement days in Newcastle, we come back to the Journal, the biggest and most important component of my dwindling laboratory. Ironically, it will be the easiest component to relocate — just a few clicks on the mouse, the uploading of some files and access codes and — Whoosh — it will be gone from my office, and Mike Racke will be in charge! Just like that! But WAIT!! WE’RE NOT FINISHED YET! What about all the stuff still remaining? I know some fellow once said “Life is the time spent moving matter from one place to another,” but this is my life I’m talking about and I have run out of places! How about...... ummm...... a tag sale on the front lawn at Einstein? What a great idea!! I can see it now..........