

# Remembering Dr Jerry Labadie

1957–2012

Jerry was fabulous. He would have been amused to be linked to the common use of the word – ‘glitzy’, ‘exaggerated’ or ‘extreme’ – as a description of himself, but I use the word with an older meaning: a ‘rare treasure’. He might have been amused by that idea also, since he was a modest person. His quiet strength; his witty, wise comments; the smile often on his face, reassuring to all who met him, a sign of the optimism that motivated him, are all features that made him stand out. You always felt comfortable and encouraged with Jerry. That’s what everyone says, and that effect is rare and is treasured by those whom he touched, as family, as a friend or as a colleague. That’s why he was fabulous.

Part of Jerry’s strengths was also his ability to explain complex issues in a few well chosen words or pictures. He was sparing with words, but used them to great effect in his professional as well as his personal life. When he agreed with you, he would say one word, ‘Yes’. He didn’t need to say anything more; you knew you had his unstinting support. If he disagreed he was direct and clear on why he disagreed, but you never felt put down or antagonized by his disagreement. He willingly accepted differences of opinion around issues, as a way to learn on both sides and to progress.

Jerry started out his post-graduate life as a medical doctor in the Netherlands as a paediatrician, although he moved into the vaccines area after a few years. I would have been very happy to have been a child looked after by Jerry: his strength and optimism were contagious, and there are lovely photographs of him holding his children and one grandchild; he was clearly happy with children. Jerry has four children who are his pride.

Jerry worked as a senior scientist with the clinical vaccines research area of the Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment. He was passionate about the value of vaccines, and his balanced consideration of the

great benefits against the very small risks from immunization has been the hallmark of his work. It is very rare to find such an effective person, who influenced people worldwide, getting them to understand that safety with vaccines and immunization must be considered, discussed and, most of all, understood and communicated in order to be fair to those millions of people who use them, or need to consider whether their children should be immunized. This challenge is particularly relevant with the misinformation that is so widespread on the Internet, and Jerry monitored all media regularly and kept all his colleagues up-to-date with valuable commentary.

In the year 2000 he took his vaccine and paediatric expertise with him to Lareb, the Netherlands Pharmacovigilance Centre, where he broadened his interests into general pharmacovigilance. He started to work with the WHO and Uppsala Monitoring Centre (UMC) in 2008, still living in the Netherlands and still in touch with his colleagues from Lareb. His new remit was to advance vaccine safety within the WHO programmes and in the UMC, so that all countries may be able to record, examine and analyse global vaccine experience more usefully. This work has moved forward rapidly and the primary goals have been fulfilled; in this short space of nearly 4 years he has had a huge impact, now not only in the Netherlands, but on colleagues worldwide.

Jerry was due to move to Sweden with the love of his life, Inger, this year, on a permanent appointment. Staff at the UMC, who have been working with him on and off for the last few years, were all looking forward to having him around all the time. Inger was looking forward to returning to her home country. Now that will never happen because of an inexplicable traffic accident that resulted in Jerry, alone in his car one summer morning a few weeks ago, hitting a lorry head-on whilst travelling to work. He died instantly, and no cause for the accident has been found.

I had the privilege of meeting members of his family at his funeral; his mother, sister, children and an uncle. From them it is possible to understand how Jerry was influenced, and how in turn he affected his family. They are a close family who talk to each other in an open way. They know

each other in a deeper sense than most of us, I felt. They talked about their strengths, weaknesses and hopes within the family without the usual hesitations in talking to a stranger; there is a deep feeling of mutual pride between each one of them, and trust. Inger, Jerry's wife, is fortunate to be a part of that family. She met Jerry when he first came to a course at the Uppsala Monitoring Centre where she was then working. They have had only about 10 years together, in a happiness that was evident to all who knew them, but now cruelly cut short. So, Jerry reflected, and was reflected in, his whole family. Our loss is only a fraction of theirs, but I know that the family was supported and comforted by knowing how much people from around the world valued Jerry.

There have indeed been condolences sent from all over the globe expressing some of the thoughts I have tried to capture in this memorial. So many people mourn the passing of Jerry Labadie, knowing him in many different ways, but our lasting memory should not be just of sadness. Jerry with his strength, humour and wisdom has touched us, and we should remember the happiness he has given us, and the lessons he has taught.

He has changed the world, particularly the world of patient safety and of children, in an indelible way. His life and work is real, not just a memory.

*I. Ralph Edwards*  
Uppsala Monitoring Centre,  
Uppsala, Sweden