

Obituary: Alex Sevanian

*...quem non virtutis egentem
abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo.*

Virgilius, *Aeneides* XI, 28

Our dear friend and distinguished colleague Alex Sevanian, died suddenly on February 16, 2005, when he eventually lost the final battle against the disease he was fighting over the last 6 years.

Alex was born in Germany on November 3, 1946, where war events had brought his father, the last and the most relevant composer of the ancient Armenian music. A few years later the family moved to California. Alex was deeply linked to his parents, his sister Deanna and his grandmother; not just to the Caucasian soul, but certainly also due to the profound relationship with music that he shared with the family. Alex grew up immersed in music, and this certainly positively affected his unique capability of interacting with friends and colleagues. In 1976, Alex married Diana, and the couple had two sons, David and Andrew. Alex was a careful father, providing the best possible education to his sons.

Alex had a remarkable scientific career in biochemistry of lipids and free radical mechanisms of oxidative damage. After his bachelor's degree in biology from California State University, Northridge, his M.S. and Ph.D in biochemistry from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), he started a post-doctoral training in the Laboratory of James Mead.

In 1981, Paul Hochstein brought Alex to the School of Pharmacy at the University of Southern California, where Alex spent the greatest part of his career. The Institute for Toxicology started by Paul at USC, where Alex was working, became one of the most acknowledged centers in the world for the study of free radicals and oxidative damage mechanism. Several of the most distinguished



scientists in the field joined the Institute and many others did cooperate directly or indirectly. Practically nobody in this field missed the opportunity of positively interacting with Alex at the Institute.

Alex was also a founding member of the Oxygen Society, and Secretary General of the International Society for Free Radical Research.

The major scientific achievements have been about the molecular toxicology of lipid peroxidation products—particularly cholesterol oxidation products; the regulation and function of phospholipase A₂; and the elucidation of the structure and biological effects of an atherogenic form of LDL. Alex also contributed to major clinical studies on the effect of antioxidants or hormones on the evolution of atherogenesis.

Alex did science with dedication and passion, and with remarkable pleasure planning, running and writing his experimental work. We will miss his fruitful discussions, accurate suggestions, bright ideas and lucid imagination.

But, all friends will miss something more about Alex: his unique capability of interacting with people in a calm and helpful way. Alex was able in giving the real value to events of life, having the culture to understand, and the ability to drive others to understand, that life is much more than a scientific career and that its quality is so important and must be protected.

Alex was able to describe in few words the soul of a Mahler symphony and to remain speechless in front to a sunrise from the sea, behind the Greek Temple of Segesta in Sicily. Alex was able to experience, with a special emotional feeling, the most simple as well as the most profound aspects of life, from tasting a glass of a great wine to meditating on the existential meaning of our passage in this world.

Thank you Alex. Although your life was so short, you gave us a great lesson. Your way of merging culture, humanity and science will remain forever

your legacy for all of us. We are proud of having been your friends.

*Fulvio Ursini
Matilde Maiorino
Giuseppe Poli*

For the scientific community of SFRR Europe, in the name of SFRR International, which is indebted to Alex Sevanian for outstanding service and support through many years, and for the Oxygen Club of California (OCC), we join our colleagues Ursini, Maiorino, and Poli in this tribute to Dr Sevanian.

Regina Brigelius-Flohé, President, SFRR Europe
Helmut Sies, President, OCC, and
Editor-in-Chief, FRR
Barry Halliwell, Editor-in-Chief, FRR