William Allan Award Introduction: Haig H. Kazazian, Jr.

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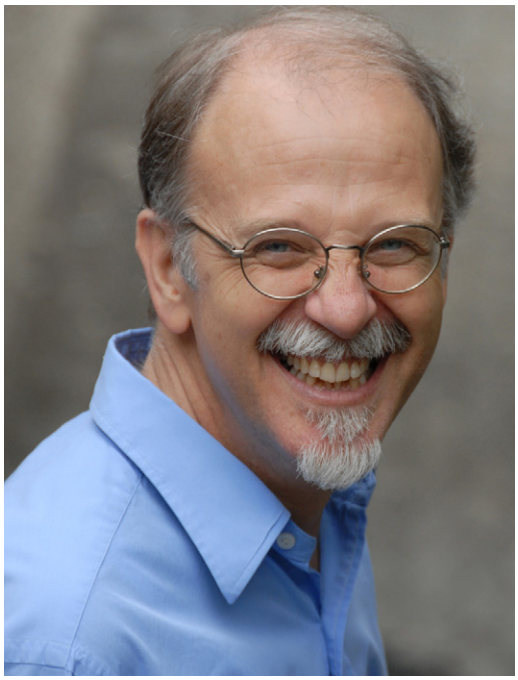

Stylianos E. Antonarakis

It is a great honor, pleasure, and privilege to introduce to the members and guests of the American Society of Human Genetics the recipient of the 2008 Allan Award, Haig H. Kazazian Jr., who is currently the Saymour Gray Professor of Molecular Medicine and Genetics and Chairman of the Department of Genetics in the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

The list of Allan Awardees is tremendously distinguished; in all of them the Society recognizes "substantial and far-reaching scientific contributions to human genetics, carried out over a sustained period of scientific inquiry and productivity." Haig joins them with the pride that his contributions were truly substantial, far-reaching, important, unique, and many; in addition, Haig joins the group with a unique style and charm.

Haig, a son of an Armenian couple of immigrants, was born in Toledo Ohio. His father, from Kayseri, Turkey, was lucky to escape the terror of the 1915 persecutions, forced marches, concentration camps, and death (known as the Armenian genocide); after many years of wandering, he came to the U.S. in 1923. His mother came from Istanbul in 1920. Haig was raised with his brother in a household in which Armenian, Turkish, and English were spoken, that left an epigenetic mark on him that I recognized many years later when I realized his kindness and understanding towards people that spoke English with a terrible accent, such as me. After his initial education in the public school system, where he excelled in math and chemistry, he attended Dartmouth College in Hannover, NH, and received his A.B. in 1959; he continued with the first 2 years of Medical School there and then the 2 subsequent years at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, where he graduated in 1962. He completed pediatrics training in the University of Minnesota Hospitals and at Hopkins and was attracted to a pediatric genetics fellowship at Hopkins with Barton Childs (1964–1966). During the Vietnam period, he was a Staff Associate at the Laboratory of Molecular Biology of the NIH, working with Harvey Itano. He joined the Faculty of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1969, rose quickly to Professor, and had a stellar Academic career there for the next 25 years. At Hopkins he led the pediatric genetics first, and the Center for Medical Genetics later, with special attention to excellence and to research competitiveness. A considerable number of notable and successful medical geneticists today consider Haig as their mentor and a strong career supporter. He made numerous important and exciting contributions to the understanding of the molecular basis of monogenic disorders, particularly hemoglobinopathies and hemophilia. For about a decade his laboratory was the most exciting place for the study of the neutral and pathogenic genomic variability of the beta globin gene cluster; terms such as polymorphic sites, haplotypes, cross-over, linkage disequilibrium, and molecular detection were the daily routine vocabulary. In addition, his laboratory was among the first in the world to establish a molecular detection facility for monogenic disorders, and he was (with Dick Cotton) the founding coeditor of the successful journal *Human Mutation*. In the last 5 years of his Hopkins tenure, Haig became interested in LINE retrotransposition, a theme that he further developed as almost an exclusive subspecialty in the genome analysis. In 1994, after a lot of thinking and mixed feelings, he moved to the University of Pennsylvania to chair the Department of Genetics. His research, obsessively focused on the LINE elements now, blossomed in spite of the numerous administrative responsibilities, including building up the department and mentoring the

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young faculty members. Most of us who admire Haig's achievements wonder how he was and is able to manage his time in such a way that he stays in the forefront of research and maintains a well-funded laboratory in the midst of academic detractions and the time-eater administrative burden. His scientific journey has produced more that 350 well-cited papers, some of them classics[1–11] by now, and avant garde at the time of publication. For his contributions Haig has been honored by the Mead Johnson Award for Pediatric Research, an award from the National Hemophilia Foundation, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, which elected him as a member, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

More than 50 postdocs and graduate students had the privilege and the good luck to work in his scientific environment. I was very lucky and honored to be one of them. With an MD degree from the University of Athens, a couple of years of clinical residency, a lot of dreams, and the vivid image of the Acropolis view when I opened my window at home, I arrived in Baltimore a humid and 100°F hot summer day; I put my suitcase in the then miserable Reed Hall across the dome and went directly to the lab at CMSC10. I found Haig sitting in the middle of the lab talking to people around him as they were pipetting or loading a gel or looking at bands on a film. He was a warm, unpretentious, civilized, curious, talkative gentleman, with a burning internal fire for conquering the unknown. Fifteen minutes of conversation and the fact that he was there in the middle of the lab all the time convinced me that his lab was what I was looking for and in my dreams was comparable to that of the Morgan lab at Columbia that I had read before extensively. In the next almost 15 years, he walked me through the wonders of the lab work, helped me to dream of restriction sites, and showed me the way to become an independent investigator, a fair competitor, a collaborator, and a friend.

Haig is also an exemplary family man, proud for his blessed life with Lilli, and also proud for his children Haig and Sonya, their families, and his five grandchildren.

Haig is quite an overachiever. His contributions are often appreciated after the dust is settled, and unlike with other cases, time shows how important what he did was. He is a true gentleman, who avoids conflict and quietly and continuously (r)evolutionizes his field. The people who know him well say that his three most prominent characteristics are (1) his great scientific intellect and his uncompromising approach to the generation of high-quality results; (2) his generosity in supporting the careers of those under him, even long after he has any direct responsibility for doing so; and (3) his modesty (and this is part of the reason why his work perhaps has not received the recognition it deserves).

It is with great personal pleasure, appreciation, and respect that I present to the members of the American Society of Human Genetics Dr. Haig H. Kazazian, Jr. as the recipient of the 2008 William Allan Award.

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