Richard Burman
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I am a 5th-year medical student at UCT, concurrently completing a Masters of Science in Medicine (MSc Med). I have never been a formal student of Prof. Beighton and have only ever had a very limited exposure to one of his many fields of study. My chosen field is in the neurosciences, with my dissertation specifically focusing on the cellular mechanisms underlying epileptic disorders – vastly different from any of Prof. Beighton's known areas of expertise. This intercalated course of study includes both clinical and laboratory training and aims to allow me to develop the necessary skills to pursue a career as a so-called 'clinician-scientist'. These healthcare professionals are expected to be proficient in both clinical medicine and laboratory work, focusing on translational research.

Undoubtedly, Prof. Beighton, throughout his career, has so excellently held the position of one of SA's leading clinician-scientists. This indeed makes him a true inspiration to others like me who wish to navigate a similar journey within the extensive demands of the SA healthcare system.

Since being informally introduced to Prof. Beighton in my 2nd year, he has profoundly inspired my ambitions and expectations around developing myself as both an astute clinician and an inquisitive scientist. I am truly appreciative of his mentorship. I have further found that without the imposed requirements of a supervisor-student relationship, the time I have spent with Prof. Beighton has allowed for significant development, both academically and personally.

In reflecting on Prof. Beighton's contribution to my own scholarly pursuits, I started to become curious about how mentorships are formed. There is clearly a big drive toward integrating formalised mentorship programmes into most courses of study, with the undergraduate medical sciences being particularly fond of the concept. While there is merit in trying to add structure to the process, a more informal and 'organic' development of mentoring relationships appears to be more productive. In this form, the impact transcends across distinctly different fields, adding an invaluable outside perspective to the benefit of both parties concerned.

In his ability to easily negotiate a myriad of different interests, Prof. Beighton is equally versatile enough to focus his skills on continuing to shape the minds of the next generation of aspiring clinician-scientists. For this reason, he should not only be considered a 'giant' in medical genetics, but rather in academic medicine in its entirely.

Janine Scholefield
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I came to Human Genetics in 2000, when Prof. Beighton had just handed over the mantle of HoD to Prof. Ramesar, who then took the Division into a new arena of genomics. It was apparent, however, very early on in my time that Prof was held in the highest esteem by his friends and colleagues in the Department. Not that many of us lowly honours students spent a significant amount of time with him. To be honest, I didn't even know how to get to his office. In fact, my image of him in his space was always more akin to that of a wizard in an ivory tower than sitting mundanely at a desk in a chair. In my mind it was important not to disturb him unless you'd basically cured cancer and you needed him to check your results.

This is not to say for one minute that Prof was anything but approachable. During my postgraduate career, I learnt that he was incredibly eager to assist in clarifying some of the more confounding ideas I had about genetics. He is also a prolific writer and I recall him constantly developing new research projects. One incident saw him engaging me on a new project on one of his collagen mutations midway through writing up my PhD. Writing up or no writing up, you don't say no to Prof, and so, of course, I put together a reasonable experimental plan. It took my then supervisor, Prof. Greenberg, to rein him in and delicately remind him this was no time for me to be back on the bench.

Others in this Festschrift will write extensively of his incredible scientific mind and they'll do it with greater insight than I. To be honest, my enduring memories of Prof come more from his character, in particular his schoolboy-like cheekiness. One of his classic comments that remains imprinted in my mind (like an X chromosome after meiosis) had us in stitches for days. It is also completely inappropriate for this journal (for any journal for that matter). I also recall his complete inability to remain silent in the face of blatant quackery. I remember someone once inviting a levitation expert to give a lecture. It hurts me to watch someone grilled by Prof – in fact it is wincingly painful; but then, unsubstantiated claims in the face of logic have little chance. I've learnt never to be afraid to ask a question since that day. Prof also had great belief in his students. After I was accepted to a position overseas he congratulated me by saying, 'My girl, you're either going to win a Nobel prize or just be an associate professor.' I'm doubtful of the Nobel prize, Prof, so please don't be disappointed that I'm gunning for the latter.

David Ewing Duncan wrote a book in which he describes some of the doyens of the biotechnology era and compares them to famous fictional characters. It was useful because as you read each of the individuals' great exploits you had an idea of their personality, making their contributions to science that much more engaging. (Our own Sydney Brenner, for example, was compared to Shakespeare's mischievous Puck). To sum up Prof, we would need to find a character with a great mind that cherished knowledge, an almost childlike enthusiasm for studying and a great passion for their work; someone who had been showered with honours, yet retains an almost brushed-aside modesty; someone with a great love of their students, willing them to do well and enjoying reciprocal respect. And they would need a very cheeky twinkle in their eye.

So, Dumbledore … a really, really good-looking Dumbledore.

Lecia Bartmann
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Prof. Beighton, thank you for being my mentor and friend, and for helping me develop a love and passion for human genetics. You are a true educator who gave your students a good understanding of the subject, walked with them till they found their direction and encouraged them until they reached their goals.

Looking back over the years from 1972 till 2006, I remember those early days of breaking into the virgin territory of human genetics in the Western Cape, you inspiring all those who met you with your wealth of knowledge, and the compassion that you showed to the patients and students. Investigating the sclerosteosis families was a wonderful experience. We visited families in their homes and flew to outlying areas where clinics were set up at the local hospitals for patients to be assessed. I was privileged to participate in the epidemiological surveys at Tsumkwe, Namibia, the Xhosa survey at Tsolo in the Transkei and to work with family data from Tristan da Cunha. What fun we had, with humour and laughter always part of the work environment.

After being out of the Department for several years while I was raising my family, I returned to work in the Department and was taught how to extract DNA from blood samples. This related to a research study of the retinal degenerative disorders. My task was to liaise between affected families, the Retinal Preservation Foundation and the Department. I travelled to the four corners of SA to collect blood samples from the families affected by retinal disorders such as retinitis pigmentosa, Usher syndrome, Stargardt's disease, Leber's congenital amaurosis, macular degeneration and other less common retinal disorders. Aspects of the study included drafting family pedigrees, counselling the families, and encouraging affected persons to overcome their disability and achieve their aims in life.

Along with the expectation of a high standard of work ethics, you were always available to guide me in the right direction. Prof. Beighton, you were my inspiration over the years and, as the Retinal Degenerative Disorder Coordinator, I thank you.

'May the Lord bless and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you Peace.' Numbers 6:24-26