

From the Editor-in-Chief

In Memoriam – Robert Mark Freedom (1941–2005)

“I put all my genius into my life; I put only my talent into my works”¹

It is with considerable sadness that I use this version of *News and Comments* to inform our paediatric cardiac community of the death of my good friend, colleague, and collaborator Robert Freedom. All of those who knew him will attest to the fact that, in all respects, he was larger than life. And life will be so much less fun with his passing. It was appropriate that the previous issue of *Cardiology in the Young* contained not only the biography written by Lee Benson and myself that enshrined the “big man” in our Hall of Fame,² but also another of his masterful reviews appearing in our series devoted to continuing medical education.³ It is equally appropriate that one of the most encyclopaedic of reviews, concerned with ventricular noncompaction, appears in this issue of the *Journal*.⁴ This article in itself encapsulates all the very best things about Bob Freedom. It shows his attention to detail, his ability to think “outside the box”, and above all, his huge knowledge not only of his own discipline, but related aspects of basic science. His discussion of the circulatory system of the antarctic icefish is truly remarkable.⁴ And this is not all. At *Cardiology in the Young*, we hold three as yet incomplete contributions that have been entrusted to me as one of his literary executors. I hope to complete these works, in collaboration with his colleagues in Toronto, and to publish them as an ongoing reminder of his huge contributions to the field of cardiology in the young. I have been told by his wife, Penny, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy, that his passing was peaceful. We know, nonetheless, that his final years, subsequent to retirement, were far from easy. He suffered from the consequences of diabetes, and had both severe cardiac and renal failure over his final months. Yet such was his attention to work and science that it would have been difficult to know, from his e-mails, that there were problems. Many of us discussed, over the years, his seeming immortality. He seemed to match the experience of Dorian Gray, the creation of his own hero, Oscar Wilde, another of whose sayings appears at the head of this appreciation. Now we must recognise that he was not indestructible.



Following his wishes, his body was cremated, and the ashes scattered in his retirement town of Granville Ferry, in Nova Scotia. He specifically requested that there should be no funeral. If all goes well, nonetheless, and I write this in advance, having only heard yesterday of the news of his death, a celebration of his life will be held during the meeting scheduled to be held in Toronto in May. This should have taken place by the time you read this tribute. We are sure that this is the way that Bob would have liked to be remembered.

There are so many reasons why Bob Freedom deserves to be remembered. He has been one of the giants of paediatric cardiology as it has grown from a small part of paediatrics to become a specialty in its own right. He trained with the past giants, notably Alex Nadas and Dick Rowe, and has done so much to make sure that the baton is handed on. When he came close to retirement, he was determined that the department he inherited from Dick Rowe would continue to grow and develop. This has been splendidly achieved. The biography contained in the Hall of Fame¹ summarises his achievements, and the insightful interview, conducted so skilfully by Lee Benson, gives an appropriate flavour of the man. As he stated in this interview: “I am especially enamoured of the role in training, and my interface for nearly three

decades with my fellows in the training programme". He also emphasised "the rewards of recognition", and commented on the "privilege of being invited virtually all over the world to speak at international meetings". The reports of some of those encounters have now entered the folklore of paediatric cardiology, and it is a truism to state that he became a legend in his own lifetime. As is emphasised in the Hall of Fame, his legacy will remain through his publications and textbooks. Few would doubt that he took the practice of angiography to new heights. In terms of pathology, he clarified the structure of so many lesions, not least pulmonary atresia with intact ventricular septum. He was a pleasure to work with, but even more of a pleasure to spend time with. His conviviality and generosity were known not only by those such as myself, who

were fortunate enough to count him as a close friend, but by the very many fellows who now carry his torch throughout the World. He will be sorely missed.

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References

1. Oscar Wilde. Journal entry, June 29, 1913.
2. Benson LN, Anderson RH. Robert Mark Freedom MD, FRCPC, FACC, O. Ont. *Cardiol Young* 2005; 15: 206–212.
3. Freedom RM, Yoo S-J, Russell J, Perrin D, Williams WG. Thoughts about fixed subaortic stenosis in man and dog. *Cardiol Young* 2005; 15: 186–205.
4. Freedom RM, Yoo S-J, Perrin D, Petersen S, Anderson RH. The morphological spectrum of ventricular noncompaction. *Cardiol Young* 2005; 15: 345–364.