

In memoriam

By Vladimir A. Lesnikov



Evgenij Belyavskij. Photo courtesy of Marina P. Lesnikova

I first met Evgenij Belyavskij in 1968 when I was a third year medical student and accepted into the department of General Pathology at the Institute of Experimental Medicine to study the experimental technique of intrabrain injection. I remember Evgenij “catching” heat- and cold-sensitive neurons from a rabbit’s hypothalamus by recording their electrical activity in an anesthetized animal while smoking a cigarette and telling stories about thermoregulation and fever. This was the period when Western and Soviet scientists competed to be the first to explore new developments in the field of the mechanism of pyrogen action. This was the time when I developed my lifelong passion for the nature of fever. Later on, K. E. Cooper recognized that Belyavskij was the first to demonstrate the characteristic changes in the activity of thermosensitive hypothalamic neurons in response to a pyrogenic stimulus. Evgenij supervised me and was my main mentor during the time I wrote my Ph.D. thesis on the subject of “Central Control in the Development of Fever”.

Working with him was easy, interesting and enjoyable; he was principled, never fretted, and unassumingly conveyed one a confidence in what one was doing. Several years of working side by side resulted in a completed thesis and the publication of several coauthored articles, including a popular piece called “The Secrets of Thermoregulation” in a Leningrad newspaper and a review on “Central Mechanisms of Temperature Homeostasis” in the academic periodical “Human Physiology” (in Russian).

We went on a number of unforgettable trips: I remember summer fishing in Primorsk for perch that we smoked right on the shore; walleye, our boat taking off into a mighty wave; porcini mushrooms in the midst of high grass on the islands; northern pikes and breams on the Vuoksa river on the Karelian Isthmus. The largest northern pike I have ever seen carried the both of us in tow on a kayak for about 40 minutes, then got away, but we were happy. In the winter, smelt from under the ice on the Gulf of Finland. There was a break in the ice ten meters away from us: we

were lucky to be on the shore side. Duck hunting in the fall, the two of us on a kayak. Evgenij only rowed; he never held a gun.

Evgenij left us in 1996. He was 57.

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