

# A Giant of Neuroanesthesiology Has Passed— Maurice S. Albin

March 18, 1923 to July 2, 2016

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**M**aurice Albin, a man who lived and studied history, loved academics as a higher calling, and influenced many young and old students and colleagues, died this past July at home in Birmingham, Alabama. The major events of his life included growing up in Brooklyn, military service in Europe as a medic during World War II, matriculation to and graduation from college and medical school, residency in anesthesiology and a NIH fellowship at Mayo followed by an academic career in neuroscience and Neuroanesthesiology in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, and UAB. Details are fully outlined in his obituary in the *Birmingham News*.<sup>1</sup> I have known him since I was a medical student at Pitt in about 1976 and provide these reflections.

The last time I saw Dr. Albin he organized a visit for me to speak at UAB in 2015. I am sitting in his office waiting for him to appear at the appointed time of our meeting. I hear a recurrent noise, clunk-clunk, clunk-clunk, clunk-clunk, and it's getting closer, Dr. Albin appears, complaining about the residual effects of the frostbite he got at the Battle of the Bulge making it difficult to walk without his walker y.

One day in B1976, glass room outside OR 8 Presbyterian Hospital in Pittsburgh: Dr. Albin with his neuroanesthesia fellow, future SNACC president Phillipa Newfield, with confused medical student, future SNACC president Andrew Kofke are chatting. Discussions that day settled the issue for me, it'll be anesthesia and not any of the other choices being considered (EM, IM, NS, Neurol). Other recollections since then include treating a celebrity patient with MH (ice packs, procainamide), 6 sitting cranis a day with Dr. Jannetta (also past SNACC president and also recently deceased), ongoing research in

the department laboratories (Fig. 1), his unremitting presence at SNACC meetings always discussing and questioning presentations and always with many of his own scientific abstracts y his moving away from Pittsburgh to Texas and later Alabama, leaving an opening at Pitt that I filled some years later. His scientific interests varied, including neuroprotection, spinal cord and brain hypothermia, venous air embolism, transcranial Doppler, and an insatiable interest in history. Along with this, an irritation with those not familiar with literature and science of the 20th century and before.

His final advice repeated to me often over the past few years: "Retire Slowly." Well, he certainly followed that advice himself, retiring from clinical practice at age 78 and after that continuing to contribute to academics

Dr. Albin participated in some of the most enormous history of the 20th century as an infantry medic in World War II (Fig. 2), often speaking of the Battle of the Bulge and the frostbite he and many others sustained. He was part of the Occupation and told a story of his befriending a German academic at a classical music concert.<sup>2</sup> His respect for the veterans of WW2 was profound. In my case, he spoke well of the WW2 veterans in my family and sent me an American flag on the passing of my own father, also a WW2 veteran. This undoubtedly fed his intense interest in medical history related to war, relaying his own observations from WW2 and also researching and writing on the history of medicine and



FIGURE 1. Dr. Albin in his lab at the University of Pittsburgh circa 1976.

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FIGURE 2. WW2 photo of medic Maurice Albin.

recognition, providing a video thank you on the occasion of the first lecture and continued to have an ongoing

anesthesia as it pertained to the Civil War. Most recently he sent me a book on D-Day by McManus: *The Dead and Those About to Die*, with an inscription dedicating it to my Liberator airman uncle from WW2.

Dr. Albin invited me to speak at UAB, also inviting me to meet his adult children and many of his grandchildren. He was committed to his family and clearly to my observation he was the family patriarch. I think he and his wife Marguerite are most proud of their children being well accomplished, and to me seemingly happy perhaps his most satisfying accomplishments and legacy. Notably, his son Roger, an academic neurologist at the University of Michigan, has spoken at the annual SNACC meeting, providing a detailed talk on Parkinson's Disease.

As outlined in the articles on the founding of SNACC<sup>3,4</sup> Dr. Albin was a main mover in getting SNACC started. He was a founding member, second president, recipient of the distinguished service award, and, as long as he was able, an annual contributor to each SNACC meeting. In the 21st century (Fig. 3), he continued to contribute to the SNACC newsletter, fully participating in the debate over neuroanesthesia fellowships and other topics. To provide enduring recognition of his essential contribution to SNACC and to Neuroanesthesiology, SNACC named the annual meeting keynote lecture after him. I know he appreciated this



FIGURE 3. More recent photo of Dr. Albin at the University of Alabama Birmingham, in slow retirement mode.

interest in the speakers chosen by the annual meeting organizers.

Dr. Albin was committed to academic anesthesia with an impressive dedication to neuroscience. I recall a talk he gave at Pitt in the 70s where he made a point of the central importance of the brain. This was a relatively unusual utterance from an anesthesiologist at that time. He thought that academic medicine was a higher calling and never stopped acting like an academic anesthesiologist. Recognition of this was provided when UAB established an endowed professorship in his name.

Late in life he continued critiquing scientific papers, woe to the author who didn't quote important work from the 20th century. He continued to write about the

potential use of hypothermia and other topics, recently sending me a review article he co-authored on venous air embolism (of course) in eye surgery. An analysis of his indexed publications reveals 184 with 2141 citations dating to a 1965 article with Robert White in *Science* (Brain transplantation: Prolonged survival of brain after carotid jugular interposition). In recent years, he was also a frequent contributor to SNACC and ASA newsletters.

Dr. Albin influenced many who are themselves also affecting many. His impact on this and future generations of neuroanesthesiologists is indeed geometric. But the cycle of

life moves on. He will certainly be missed even as his legacy endures.

A Threnody for Pain<sup>5</sup> Maurice  
S. Albin, M.D., M.Sc.

IT comes-Sin Permiso  
With/Without Eclat Inhumane:

IT casts no shadow  
IT lies hidden in the  
Pulsations through the Circuits,

Betrayed by the Mind Øh  
Pain!  
Øh Dolor!  
Øh Schmerz!  
Øh Doleur!  
Øh Harbor of Madness!  
God/Lord! Succor me with Lethe  
Place me in the arms of a  
Beneficent Aesculapius  
To work his/her magic without a  
TOLL

## BCON PERMISO~

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