



William Martin Gelbart

## In Memoriam William Martin Gelbart (1945–2015)

**W**ILLIAM Martin Gelbart died Tuesday morning, August 11, 2015, after a valiant fight with cancer. Bill was born September 11, 1945, in Brooklyn, New York. He obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Brooklyn College in 1966 and a Ph.D. in Genetics from the University of Wisconsin in 1971, working in the laboratory of Alan Fox. He did postdoctoral work with Ed Lewis at California Institute of Technology and with Art Chovnick at the University of Connecticut before joining the Harvard University faculty in 1976, a position he held until his passing. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1980 and to Full Professor in 1983.

His research focused on the genetics and genomics of the fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*. In the Chovnick laboratory he participated in fine structure recombinational analyses of the *rosy* (*ry*) locus and succeeded in identifying structural and regulatory regions of the gene by purely genetic means. He became interested in the process of transvection (pairing-dependent control of gene expression), due to the influence of Ed Lewis, and he published several articles on the topic. His Harvard laboratory focused on understanding the molecular basis of pattern formation, concentrating on cell–cell signaling related to the *decapentaplegic* (*dpp*) pathway, on which he did the seminal and definitive work.

Beyond his many research contributions, Bill was well respected for his leadership in the *Drosophila* community. He served as Principal Investigator for FlyBase since the project was initiated in 1991. This publicly available data source has become an invaluable resource to the international research community; its utility is due in no small part to Bill's dedication and leadership of the project.

Bill was committed to community service. A small list includes organizing the *Drosophila* meeting, serving on the *Drosophila* board, and serving as its president. He was

a member of the Scientific Advisory Boards of WormBase, the Zebrafish Information Network, the *Arabidopsis* Information Resource, and The Germplasm Resources Information Network. He was a member of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) Large-Scale Genome Sequencing Network Advisory Committee, the National Advisory Council to the NHGRI, Chair of the NHGRI Coordinating Committee for Selection of Large-Scale Sequencing Projects, and a Board Member of Genome Canada. He was an advisor to the original Human Genome Sequencing project.

He was a member of the Genetics Society of America (GSA) Board of Directors, an Associate Editor of *GENETICS*, and the 2010 recipient of GSA's George W. Beadle Award for contributions to the community of genetics researchers.

An abiding devotion of Bill's was the meetings on the molecular biology of *Drosophila* held at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, Greece. Bill was a mainstay at these meetings from their inception in 1980, and he attended every session. He acted as Chair of the meeting for the last 4 years. Bill and his wife Susan gained an appreciation and love of Greek culture and made innumerable friends in the local scientific community and beyond. Indeed Bill and Susan became well known in small villages on the island where they were treated as respected friends and family.

Bill was a dedicated teacher who provided a clear introduction to genetics to scores of Harvard undergraduates. He mentored many graduate and postgraduate students in his laboratory who have gone on to successful careers in research and teaching in academia and industry. He was a Harvard College Freshman Advisor for many years and the Faculty Advisory Committee Chair of The Harvard Foundation, promoting intercultural and race relations. For many years, he served as the Head Tutor for the undergraduate concentration in biology and as program director for an interdepartmental predoctoral training program in genetics and genomics. Bill was a coauthor of a genetics textbook that gained wide adoption due to the high quality and currency of its contents. Beyond the Harvard campus, Bill developed a course, "Frontiers in Genetics" in collaboration with colleagues at the

University of New Mexico, designed to inform and mentor underrepresented minority students in genetics and genomics. Many of its participants have gone on to graduate studies at Harvard, Stanford University, and the University of Washington.

Bill and Susan enjoyed extensive traveling and were often joined by close friends in Maui and Crete. Until recently, Bill was an avid squash player at Newton Squash and Tennis Club and an active member in club leadership, serving as its President. He was actively involved in coaching for Newton Girls Soccer and served as its president. He moved to Wayland, Massachusetts in 1999 and was active in coaching for Wayland BAYS soccer. He was a licensed FIFA soccer referee, which he enjoyed for many years.

Bill was a significant contributor to our body of scientific knowledge and was instrumental in disseminating

that knowledge widely. Bill was a force for good. He was an excellent teacher on all levels, a well-respected research scientist, and simply a wonderful human being. He never forgave Walter O'Malley for moving the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles. He salved that wound by becoming a devoted fan of the New England Patriots and the Boston Red Sox.

Bill is survived by his beloved, devoted wife, Susan; his loving daughters Marnie Carey, Courtney Phelon, and Jennifer Walsh; his adoring grandchildren Delilah, Theodore, and Amelia; his son-in-laws James Carey and Scott Phelon; his brother, Herb, and sister-in-law, Susan; and his other in-laws, many nieces, nephews, and dear friends.

We are all better for having basked in his presence; we are less with his passing. He is sorely missed.

*Thomas Kaufman<sup>1</sup>*