
In Memoriam

Laird S. Cermak, Ph.D.
June 24, 1942–November 4, 1999

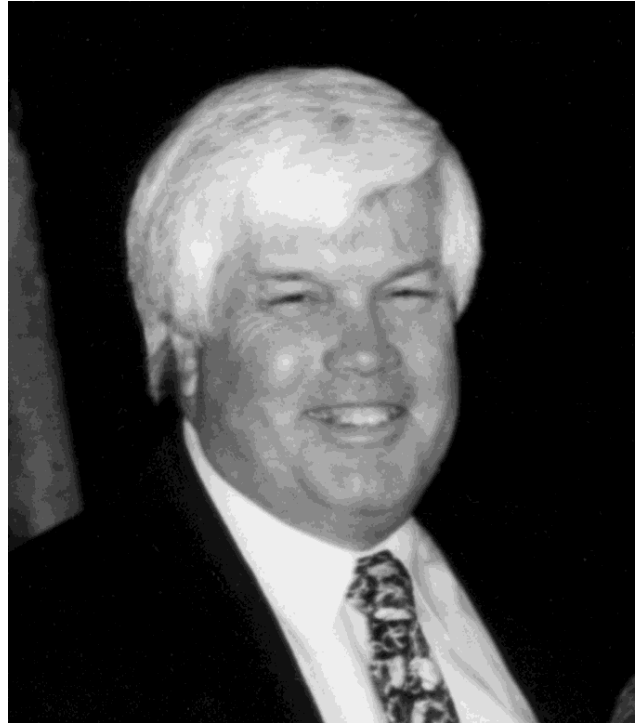
Laird Cermak was to become President of INS in February 2000, taking over the responsibilities for leading a scientific society he loved and served for over a quarter of a century. In many ways he embodied the very values the INS has always hoped to promote in excellence of scholarship, keen interest in behavioral neurosciences, and an easy and reflexive interdisciplinary citizenship. His name has been synonymous with a distinctive line of intellectual inquiry in amnesia and memory mechanisms for as long as I have been in neuropsychology myself.

It now can be told that I was alerted to Laird's considerable intellectual talent even as a graduate student. I recall that my major Professor, Phillip Rennick, showed me the initial application for research support he was reviewing that Laird had made to the Veterans Administration in the early 1970s. "Read this really excellent grant, Ken," he said, "because this guy is really going to do some significant work." Given that Phil tended to view proposals as having fatal flaws usually no later than the literature review, I was impressed and learned with awe what moved Phil. Apparently many others have joined in Phil's appraisal and appreciation of a career of scholarly promise fulfilled. I know that I did from that day. Laird took a central faculty role in one of the most protean research groups in the history of neuropsychology. His intellectual contributions were sustained and of high scholarly standards.

I also had the good fortune to later work with Laird when he was a member of the INS Board. He cared deeply about what happened with INS and contributed to the solutions to a number of vexing problems over the time I served as Executive Secretary. Never shy about taking on controversial issues, I always admired his ability to approach things in an empirical way. He was as good a Board member as INS could possibly hope to elect. He had already been putting ideas into action for his presidential term when he fell really ill.

The common and fervent hope that Laird would overcome his disease was sadly disappointed. The outpouring of support he and his family have received says it all. Everyone who knew Laird will realize that INS is one of a long list of institutions and people in the world who are poorer for his passing.

Kenneth M. Adams
President



With the untimely passing of Laird Cermak, neuropsychology has lost one of its most energetic and dedicated advocates. Laird influenced the field in numerous ways. He conducted groundbreaking studies of encoding and retrieval processes in the amnesic syndrome; founded the Memory Disorders Research Society, whose annual meeting has become a forum for cutting-edge research on memory and the brain; and edited *Neuropsychology*, a leading voice for experimental research on neuropsychological disorders. Perhaps most important, Laird was one of a small group of early pioneers who attempted to join together a neuropsychological perspective on memory with the techniques and approaches of experimental cognitive psychology.

When Laird began his career as a memory researcher in the early 1970s, there was little or no cross-talk between neuropsychologists and experimental cognitive psychologists who studied human memory. Trained as an experimentalist and intrigued by the possible insights into normal memory that could be gleaned by studying memory pathology, Laird began an influential collaboration with his close

friend and colleague, the late Nelson Butters. By systematically applying the latest paradigms and theoretical constructs from cognitive psychology to neuropsychological populations, they helped to raise the methodological and theoretical standards of the field to a new level and charted a course for the future.

Laird's multiple skills as an organizer, editor, and researcher were nowhere better illustrated than in his realization of what was, to the best of my knowledge, the first conference ever to bring together experimental cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists. Held in October 1979 at Lake Morey, Vermont, Laird managed to attract many of the most illustrious researchers of the time to the task of exploring intersections between normal and abnormal memory, including Alan Baddeley, Robert Crowder, Larry Jacoby, Elizabeth Loftus, Morris Moscovitch, Malcolm Piercy, Larry Squire, and Endel Tulving. The conference holds a special personal resonance, because Laird graciously allowed me—then a graduate student at the University of Toronto working with Tulving—to participate in the entire meeting. I will never forget the experience: the discussions were consistently animated and sometimes contentious, but always filled with a sense of excitement that a new approach to studying and understanding memory and amnesia was beginning to emerge that would capitalize on the complementary strengths of cognitive psychology and neuropsychology. Laird skillfully structured the meeting, gently guided the discussion, and carefully edited the resulting volume, entitled *Human Memory and Amnesia*, published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates in 1982. There is no doubt in my mind that the Lake Morey conference and volume had a major influence on what followed in the 1980s and 1990s: sustained and productive interactions between cognitive psychology and neuropsychology that have contributed greatly to the impressive recent progress in research on human memory.

Laird made fundamental contributions to this new approach to memory in his usual modest style, taking quiet satisfaction in the field's success and generating new ways to promote it, such as the Memory Disorders Research Society. We all owe him a debt of gratitude that we can repay by honoring his work and his memory.

Daniel L. Schacter
Harvard University

Laird Cermak will be remembered as a generous colleague, a devoted mentor, and a cherished friend. He was and will continue to be a role model for many of us, not only because of his professional accomplishments, but also because of his personal qualities—his integrity, his gentle nature, and his steady sense of purpose.

Laird's research career began in 1971 when he joined a prominent group of neuropsychologists and neurologists at the Boston VA Hospital, including Nelson Butters, Harold Goodglass, Norman Geschwind, Edith Kaplan, Edgar Zurif, Howard Gardner, and Marlene Oscar-Berman. In the com-

pany of this illustrious group of researchers, Laird began a remarkably productive career that spanned 29 years. In recognition of the high quality and impact of his work, he was appointed Research Career Scientist in 1979. In addition to his scientific contributions, Laird provided many years of dedicated service to the Boston VAMC as Director of Psychology Research. His calm, yet determined nature, coupled with his sense of responsibility, earned him the respect of colleagues and made him ideally suited for this leadership role.

As a researcher, Laird was eager to uncover the workings of human memory. He loved bringing people together on this topic—to generate ideas, to question assumptions, to challenge accepted wisdom. To provide a structure for this sort of exchange, Laird founded the Boston University Memory Disorders Research Center (MDRC). As Director of the MDRC, he created an environment that fostered collaborations and supported the development of research careers. Laird was an exceptional mentor: he gave his junior colleagues the freedom to grow and received his greatest satisfaction from seeing them succeed. The deep sense of community that exists today at the MDRC is testament to Laird's generous spirit and his steadfast loyalty to his coworkers.

Life at the MDRC was not all serious work, however. Those who have worked with Laird remember well his Friday afternoon trivia quizzes, which could cover anything from the history of neuropsychology, to baseball, to country music. The only thing that sometimes interfered with this weekly ritual was Laird's preoccupation with his daughters' soccer schedule.

By example, Laird taught us that it is possible to embrace fully the challenges and rewards that come with rich professional and personal lives. He produced an influential body of research, edited a journal, founded a professional society, served as an INS officer, never missed a deadline, and yet at no time lost sight of the fact that the heart and soul of his life was his family. His wife, Sharon, and their children, Kendra, Michael, Bethany, and Amanda, provided him with immeasurable joy and made everything else he did possible.

Laird was diagnosed with leukemia in January of 1999 while on sabbatical in Australia. He returned to Boston and fought the disease with characteristic courage and optimism. The love that his friends and colleagues felt for him was no better exemplified than by the huge outpouring of support that came in the face of his need for a bone marrow donor. Throughout his illness, Laird continued his work with a sense of purpose and by his daily presence in the lab revealed an extraordinary ability to face adversity with grace.

We have lost a remarkable colleague and friend. We miss him deeply.

Magaret Keane
Regina McGlinchey-Berth
William Milberg
Margaret O'Connor
Mieke Verfaellie