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## Professor William R.A. Muntz (1936–2005)

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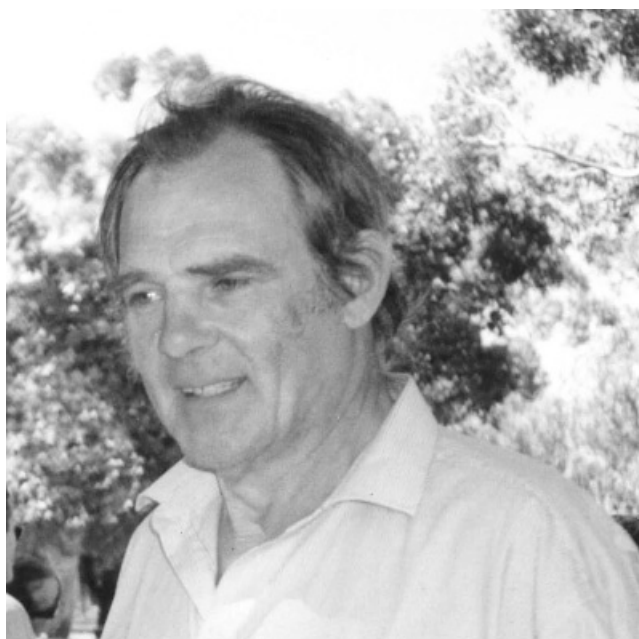
Whereas I only worked with Bill for three years when he supervised my PhD at the University of Stirling in the mid 1970s, his influence on me has lasted a lifetime. This piece, rather than summarizing the details of his considerable contributions to science, is a personal tribute to one of the most significant people in my life.

Bill's scientific life began in Oxford, where, not surprisingly given his impressive physique, he rowed with some distinction. Early in his career, he made frequent trips to the world's foremost centre for cephalopod research, the Stazione Zoologica in Naples, where he collaborated with, among others, one of the most influential biologists of the 20th century, J.Z. Young. Although most readers of this volume will know Bill from his work on fish, he was by inclination a cephalopod biologist, only working on fish he claimed, because they were easier to keep in the laboratory than squid and octopus. His early work at Oxford involved intraocular transfer in octopus, resulting in four papers presented in the elegant and clear style that were to be the hallmark of all his future writing. Although most of his subsequent career at the Universities of Sussex (England), Stirling (Scotland) and as dean of science at Monash (Australia), was devoted to topics such as the spectral sensitivity and ocular media of fish, he returned to cephalopods whenever possible, for instance spending extended periods in Fiji studying the pinhole eye of *Nautilus*.

Bill was in many ways a gentleman scientist from a bygone era, and approached his work in the way I suspect many of us would like to. One of his greatest attributes was that he did not take himself or his work too seriously. It's not that he lacked passion for his science, but there were also other, equally important, things in his life, such as his family, playing tennis and, at least on one occasion, building a harpsichord. Today we would say he had his "work-life balance" sorted out.

Bill's knowledge of biology was encyclopedic, and because of this, research seemed to come very easily for him. I recall his son Nicholas saying when he was quite young that he fancied being a zoology professor when he grew up. When I asked why, he said, "Because it seems so easy." For most of us of course it is not, but I suspect for Bill it was. He saw things so clearly that for him biology was just simply fun.

One of Bill's early important findings was to show that the tendency of frogs to escape towards blue light when disturbed is not simply because of the animals' possessing a greater sensitivity to light in this part of the spectrum, but involves true color vision, because the animals responded preferentially to blue irrespective of its intensity or saturation. I heard this work being discussed while attending a conference in Germany in the



early 1980s. Because Bill had long left this area and as his work was regarded as "classic," people assumed he must have passed away some time ago! In fact he was only 26 when the original paper was published and was less than 50 at the time of his presumed demise!

Bill was very generous and encouraging towards younger scientists. As a supervisor he was ideal, never forcing ideas or projects on me. He simply let me do as I pleased; only pointing me in the right direction when I was in danger of going off the rails. In retrospect I realize how beneficial this was, giving me the confidence to find my own way. At the end of my Ph.D. when I enquired whether he wanted to be a co-author on the manuscripts I had prepared, Bill seemed genuinely amazed. "Why, you did the work" he said. This was true, but without his ideas and guidance I would have had no coherent project. Whereas it is possible he did not want to be associated with the work, I would like to think it simply typified his selfless approach to his junior colleagues and lack of interest in promoting himself.

Not only do I have to thank Bill for an excellent start to my scientific career, but also for my wife, whom I met when we were both undergraduates at Sussex University. The main reason she

went there was because she loved the magnificent blue eyes and high cheekbones of the person who interviewed her; Bill Muntz! As I said, his influence on me has lasted a lifetime and I am sure he would not mind being remembered not only for his scientific contributions, which were substantial, but also for his remarkable personal attributes.

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