

# In Memoriam Mogens Schou

Copenhagen, November 24, 1918 – Risskov September 29, 2005

As the book “Lithium in Neuropsychiatry” edited by IGSLI, dedicated to Mogens Schou and containing two chapters by him, was nearing completion in September 2005 he passed away. He is and will always remain one of the greatest human beings and psychiatrists with whom this earth was blessed in the memories of those who benefited from his lithium knowledge and those who love and admire him. His lifelong journey with lithium started when his father --a psychiatrist suffering from depression— introduced him to hospitalized patients suffering from mental illness. Mogens’ mother, a gifted concert pianist, filled his heart with a passion for art.

I met Mogens during the early 1980’s after having been diagnosed with bipolar illness. I was attending a self-help convention on the subject to educate myself. I had been hospitalized three times for psychotic mania and psychotic suicidal depression. I was convinced that life, as I had known it, was over. A well-meaning psychiatric resident had prescribed lithium for me and had urged me to put up with the side effects. A social worker at the hospital had told me that I would never be able to resume my profession. I feared that depression would strike me down again and that it was not worth my while to actively rebuild my life pursuing love, work, and personal interests.

Enter: Mogens Schou! Following an encouraging lecture on lithium he mingled with us patients, listening intently to our stories, participated in all patient activities and self-help groups, stating that he had come to learn from patients just as much as he had come to educate and encourage them. He told women that there was no reason not to have children because of bipolar illness or because of being on lithium. He shared family stories, and felt sorry for those of us who did not have a family. At the Schou house Sunday family dinners were a tradition. He relished family time, saying how important it is to be embedded in such a loving cluster. He told us how his father had suffered from depression and how heart wrenching this had been to him. His brother, who also had the illness, had been a good lithium responder. In personal talks he encouraged me to everything I wanted to do. I told him that if I were ever to feel well again I would go out into the world and become an inspired patient advocate. Mogens cared immensely about patients and science, possibly at the expense of many other things from which he derived pleasure. He always took time to respond with concern and caring to issues that came up over time in the various self-help groups with which I am involved. He was convinced that self-help groups play an important role in treatment. Mogens, who has passionately maintained his dedication and integrity in promoting what for most of us bipolar patients is the best and cheapest medication: Lithium. Since a large percentage of bipolar patients eventually choose to end their lives, it is quite reassuring to know that lithium has a protective effect against suicide.

Mogens Schou has returned life not only to me but also to countless others.

On behalf of all patients and relatives I want to express my profound thanks to Mogens, who passed away on Thursday, September 29<sup>th</sup> 2005. He would have celebrated his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday in November. The weekend before his passing on he attended the IGSLI meeting in Poznan, Poland, where he gave a short presentation on “hidden bipolars”, i.e. patients who suffer from unipolar depression for many years, but eventually present with a manic episode. In the little free time we had, he did not rest. He went to see the Cathedral and other sights of Poznan; he shopped for gifts to take to his wife and four daughters. He also shopped for a state-of-the-art hearing aid, because he was too impatient to have people

repeat what they had said. His eyesight and hearing had been failing him in the last couple of years, which was an enormous frustration and handicap to him. However, his sense of humor always won out over all frailties. Probably Mogens got a bout of lumbago and/or caught a cold that weekend. Bed rest was not good for his frail constitution; he developed pneumonia and died three days after his return home. He was not finished living. He was working on a manuscript up to the time the ambulance came to take him to the hospital. He wanted to be there to care for Nete, his wife of 51 years. He wanted to remain the wise pater familias to his children and grandchildren. He wanted to do more research, apply for a research grant, and work together with his friend and colleague Jules Angst from Zurich. He was also hoping to attend the 2006-Conference of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in Toronto, when this Lithium book will come out. I had the privilege to get his recent articles and manuscripts fresh off his computer and edit them into understandable English for patients. His mind remained brilliant to the very end.

He will always live on in the hearts and souls of all who loved him and most certainly in the souls of those he gave a second life with lithium.

*Marylou Selo, Patient Advocate*

*President Werner Alfred Selo Foundation, Zug*

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