



Obituary

Ernst Niedermeyer, 1920–2012



On April 5, after nearly 2 years with colon cancer, an experience born with grace and faith, but with pain in the final weeks, Ernst Niedermeyer died, leaving Anni – his wife of 65 years, five children and six grandchildren, and a brother and sister. His teaching and lectures, his interests in clinical electroencephalography in general and in electroencephalographers and neurodiagnostic technologists in particular, and his over 240 publications, including the textbook he edited for many years and through many editions, “Electroencephalography – Basic Principles, Clinical Applications and Related Fields”, made him perhaps the most famous electroencephalographer in the world.

Ernst was born in 1920, in Schoenberg, Silesia, Germany. His father was a country doctor and obstetrician with strong, forceful opinions and temperament, and who published numerous books regarding public health, medical ethics, and theology. These interests, and particularly his opposition to Nazi racial laws and forced sterilization policies, led to his father’s imprisonment by the Nazis for 3 months, in 1938. Ernst’s father’s father was a small farmer and vintner. His father’s mother was Jewish, and his uncle Peter from that family, a beloved role model (Ghigo and McNall, 2011).

Ernst was inducted into the Third Reich military in 1938, serving in both the West and East. He was sent to Vienna to study medicine, then removed as “racially tainted and politically unreliable”, then sent to the Eastern front, where he served as a medic for a Panzer division and was wounded twice, then sent to France, where he was captured by Allied troops in 1944 (Ghigo and McNall, 2011). He spent the rest of the war in POW camps in the Midwest of the United States, assigned to tasks like picking corn, and experiencing the suspicion of pro-Nazi fellow prisoners because he attended mass and read the New York Times (Niedermeyer, 1992).

He returned to Austria after the war, receiving his M.D. from Leopold-Franz University, Innsbruck, Austria, in 1947. Except for time at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, in Paris, in 1950–51, his further training, in neurology and psychiatry, were at the University

in Innsbruck, and he remained there as docent in neurology and psychiatry, becoming acting chief of the department in 1958–60.

In 1952 the hospital acquired an Offner electroencephalograph under the Marshall Plan, but the EEGer resigned, and Ernst was assigned the job of making the thing useful, and so taught himself EEG while continuing his other, heavy clinical duties (Ghigo and McNall, 2011). As it happened, this nicely complemented his emerging scientific interests, and he began writing papers on the epilepsies. In 1960 he returned, to the US, this time with his family, and this time to join John Knott at the University of Iowa, where he stayed for 5 years, before moving, on Chuck Henry’s recommendation, to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore (Ghigo and McNall, 2011), as electroencephalographer-in-chief, and as an integral part of Earl Walker’s epilepsy surgery program. At Hopkins, among other things, he began the editorship of his famous textbook, and he named Lennox–Gastaut Syndrome (Niedermeyer, 1968). He remained at Hopkins until he retired.

Ernst’s “retirement” would be the envy of many. He continued reading clinical EEGs for many years. He continued writing – do a Medline search. Everything isn’t there, but what is confirms that he wrote papers into his 9th decade of life. He continued attending Hopkins Neurology Grand Rounds, where he contributed always useful insights regarding general neurology, neuropathology, and neurophysiology, and a wonderful historical perspective. He continued teaching and lecturing around the world.

A talented classical pianist, he enjoyed attending the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the New York Metropolitan Opera. He loved hiking and mountaineering, often doing this with his adult children and his grandchildren on vacations, climbing 144 mountains in his lifetime, continuing this into his 9th decade. He walked a mile a day in his 10th decade (Ghigo and McNall, 2011).

Among other awards, Ernst received the Hans Berger prize from the German EEG Society in 1988. He was President of the American EEG Society in 1990–91. He was editor of the American Journal of EEG Technology. We will remember his gentle warmth and humor, his many enthusiasms, and the breadth of his knowledge. We will miss him.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.clinph.2012.04.017>.

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