Praising life and longevity—“In memoriam: Chris Heward”

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As a new feature for this journal, the Executive Board of our association has approved the inclusion of obituaries of its members. Our association is dedicated to research on aging and longevity, and thus it is appropriate that we should dedicate space in our journal to members who have contributed to our endeavors through their active membership. It is an appropriate tribute to those who will no longer join in our efforts, and it is an important service for those members who remain so that they can be informed about our loss and learn more about those who have passed on. Therefore, the AGE editors invite future submissions to honor our members in this manner.

In memoriam: Chris Heward

Biogerontology has lost a tireless advocate and worker. Christopher B. Heward, PhD died on 10 January 2009, after a stormy 3-month battle with an

aggressive cancer of the esophagus. Chris was a dedicated gerontologist and a superb laboratory scientist. He completed a BA at the University of Arizona with dual majors in Chemistry and Psychology in 1972, then stayed on an additional year to earn a BS in Biology. Chris went on to graduate school at the same institution and was awarded his MS in Anatomy in 1977 and a PhD in Biology in 1981, with his thesis work on the endocrine actions of melatonin and related peptides.

Never an “ivory-tower” academic, Chris found his niche at the interface of business and biomedicine, founding Emerald Research Laboratories, a biotech/nutraceutical company, working for a time with Dr. Gregory Stock at the UCLA School of Medicine’s program on Medicine, Technology, and Society, and then becoming involved from their inception with the Kronos health care and health research companies. As President of the Kronos Science Laboratories, he conceived and pursued a variety of research and development projects aimed variously at early detection and prevention of age-related diseases, and understanding and slowing the aging process. He was internationally recognized as a seminal thinker in the area of biological aging and was the author and co-author of numerous scientific articles and book chapters.

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Chris brought to all his endeavors an astounding keenness of intellect and a broad-ranging interest in how things work. He was a consummate skeptic, with an incredibly sensitive nose for “B.S.” Chris loved a good debate; controversy was his *métier*. His watchword was, “Show me the data,” which he would then mercilessly dissect. There was no possibility of slipping shoddy work or faulty thinking past Chris Heward. Yet, he was also an enthusiast. His excitement and commitment were infectious, consistently motivating those he supervised as well as his peers and collaborators to push harder and try new approaches.

It is hard to speak or write about Chris in the past tense. His was such a powerful and compelling presence that it does not seem possible he could be gone. His energy simply lit up the space wherever he was. His ready smile, his keen humor, and his concern for others, which contrasted with his loudly proclaimed self-reliant libertarianism, endeared him to all who had the privilege of knowing and working with him. The other great thing about Chris was you always knew where you stood with him. He said exactly what he thought and he meant what he said. Diplomacy was never his long suite.

No description of Chris would be complete without mention that, as busy as he was, he was also a loving husband and good friend to his wife Pam and the proud active father of five children, an adult son and daughter, a second daughter in college, and two younger boys, one in high school and the other in middle-school. Chris was never more himself than when at home relaxing with family and friends. He truly knew how to have a good time.

When Chris learned of his diagnosis, he attacked the problem in characteristic fashion, educating himself extensively, questioning everything and everyone, and trying novel and radical approaches to therapy, when it became apparent that conventional medical and surgical treatment had little to offer. He remained a critical realist to the end, and never gave in to despair or fell back on sentiment.

Chris led a busy, productive, and happy life. That it was not longer seems tragically unfair, but he would have been the first to proclaim that the world is unpredictable and unjust. Chris did not believe in divine justice here or hereafter. He had no expectation of “pie in the sky.” Chris Heward made his own meaning and created his own purpose for being. He set a magnificent example of how to live life courageously to the fullest without illusion. He will be sorely missed by his family, friends, and colleagues dedicated to advancing research and applications in biogerontology.