

## Obituary

### Dr Gerry FitzGerald

Those who knew Gerry FitzGerald almost as a force of nature were shocked when he died in March 1994 from a brain tumour. He was 44 years old. The energy, drive and determination he brought to his research reflected his vigorous life.

Gerry was born in Newfoundland. After taking his BSc at Memorial University, MSc at McGill University (with Dr Roger Bider) and PhD at the University of Western Ontario



(with Dr Miles Keenleyside), he joined the biology department of the francophone Université Laval in Ste Foy, Quebec, in 1976 as an Assistant Professor. Much to his amusement, he spent the first months of his career learning a unique form of French, walking the picket lines in the first general faculty strike at the University. He was quickly promoted to Associate (1981) and Full Professor (1985).

Being around Gerry was like being in a hurricane. He exuded raw energy. He loved kickboxing and once invited me to work through a series of knife-fighting exercises he had discovered in a Special Forces manual (I declined: I boxed with him but drew the line at knife fighting).

Gerry was a firm believer in the art of the possible. He was intensely focused and organized. If a new methodology could help his work, he found ways to get it into his laboratory. Deadlines were set early and met, preferably yesterday. When the timetable was not being met, his innate forcefulness would come to the fore. When he got angry his face turned beet red, and then it was astonishing how things suddenly got done.

Although famously assertive, he was one of the fairest people I have known, and ruthlessly honest. You knew exactly where you stood and what was right or wrong. He would also fight long and hard to right injustices, and hated falsehoods: I remember one instance where an undergraduate student entered his office and made a series of false accusations, but failed to notice the telltale colour change – Gerry opened his window and gave the student the choice of leaving of his own volition via the door, or involuntarily by the window (a sickeningly long drop).

Gerry loved evolutionary ecology and all elements of behavioural ecology, and was fascinated by aggression. He discovered the ideal organism for his research work in the threespine stickleback, and always credited Jean Bédard for the introduction. Recognizing the potential of the salt marshes at Ile Verte as a site for field studies on these fish,

Gerry was the first to develop a long-term programme of research on their behaviour under natural conditions. The rest is history.

Gerry's research group was notably successful and productive, doing work of high quality and general interest. They made contributions to many active areas of research in behavioural ecology, investigating aggressiveness, cannibalism, kin recognition abilities, alternate reproductive strategies (early use of DNA fingerprint methodologies in fishes) and the *femme fatale* effect whereby female sticklebacks could 'charm' the aggressive males to death. Gerry maintained a long-standing collaboration with physiologist Helga Guderley of Laval's biology department. In his short career he authored or coauthored 86 refereed scientific publications and successfully trained 23 MSc and 7 PhD students. Though pleased by recognition, Gerry was immune to the vanities of the scientific ego. He was open and approachable, providing you were civil and prepared to spend hours talking sticklebacks.

Gerry's passion for his work was not all-consuming, however. His wife Anna and daughter Cheron provided a focus for a gentler, loving side to his character. He looked for opportunities to help others, and served on professional committees and editorial boards of journals, viewing these duties as investments in a better future for all, rather than a distraction from his research.

While there is always a tendency to wonder what might have been if only he'd survived, I'm sure Gerry would not have indulged in this. He had done so much already. He had superbly prepared a cohort of graduate students for their future. A colleague of his at Université Laval told me that Gerry had infected the entire biology department with his art-of-the-possible attitude. He challenged entrenched policies, demanded higher and fairer standards, and proved that graduate students could finish in a timely fashion. He earned the respect of the scientific community, and the love of my family. Gerry fought his final illness with characteristic determination, and died peacefully at home with his family.

Gerry did where others talked, and the world ended up better.

FRED WHORISKEY  
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