

OBITUARY

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Josef Schell, 1935–2003

Published online: July 4, 2003



Professor St. Josef (Jeff) Schell passed away on 17 April 2003. Needless to say, his discovery of the Ti plasmid in *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* in 1973 resolved a long-standing question of the causative agent of crown gall tumorigenesis in plants. This phenomenon is also unique, as it is the first reported example of a genetic exchange between eukaryotic cells and prokaryotes. Furthermore, the discovery paved the way for the genetic manipulation of higher plants as well as providing a decisive tool for the molecular characterization of plant growth, development and differentiation. Through-

out these developments, Jeff played a leading role in this research, and in the representation of plant sciences within the whole scientific community, and in particular in the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO).

Jeff Schell was born in Antwerp, Belgium on 20 July 1935 and graduated from the State University of Gent (Belgium), where he studied zoology. He got his PhD on the subject of comparative biochemistry after periods at Gent and Utrecht (The Netherlands). After postdoctoral research in London, Bethesda (USA) and Toronto (Canada), he became an Associate Professor and Director of the department of General Genetics at the State University of Gent in 1967. In 1970 he became a Full Professor. In 1978 he was appointed as Director of the Department of Genetic Principles of Plant Breeding at the Max-Planck-Institute for Plant Breeding at Cologne, Germany, and was appointed as C4 Professor at the Institute of Genetics of the University of Cologne. Further, from 1993 to 1999 he was nominated as a Professor of the Collège de France, Paris. He officially retired from the position of Director at the Max-Planck-Institute in 2000.

Because of his fundamental contributions to our scientific community, he was nominated for membership of innumerable academic societies and was honoured with various prizes. Among them, I only mention his receipt of the Japan International Prize together with Professor Marc Van Montagu in 1998.

At the recent Board Members' meeting of the Botanical Society of Japan chaired by the President, Professor Tsuneyoshi Kuroiwa, we decided to express our deepest gratitude for his contributions to plant sciences in Japan. To name only one occasion, Jeff Schell was a plenary lecturer at the International Botanical Congress at Yokohama, 1995. In fact, he loved to come to Japan and interacted with many people during his visits. When we last met at the EMBO Members' Meeting at Oslo in October 2002, he told me that he was no longer able to travel to Japan because of his physical difficulties.

So, on behalf of the Botanical Society of Japan, I thank Professor Schell for his always-constructive involvement in our activities.

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