Presentation of the 1997 Jean Hamburger Award to Renée Habib and Priscilla Kincaid-Smith

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Jean Hamburger was born in 1908 and was lost to us in 1992. He was a giant figure, and not just in the field of nephrology, in which he played a major role in establishing as a specialty. He was the main driving force behind the formation of the International Society of Nephrology in 1960, and it was during the Presidency of the ISN from 1984 to 1987 that his successor Donald Seldin conceived and carried through the idea of having two ISN awards, of which the Hamburger award is one, for stature in the field of clinical nephrology and clinical laboratory science.

The first award was presented in London at the Xth ISN Congress in 1987 to Willem Kolff, the 1990 award at the XIth Congress to Frank Dixon, and the 1993 award at the XIIth Congress in Jerusalem jointly to Gabriel Richet and Hugh de Wardener. In 1995, at the XIIIth Congress in Madrid, Don Seldin himself was the recipient.

Now at this XIVth Congress of the ISN I have the honor to present, on behalf of the ISN, the fifth Hamburger award to two outstanding figures in nephrology, Renée Habib and Priscilla Kincaid-Smith. Obviously, one of these two good, well-loved, long-term friends of mine must come first, and to be unbiased I will cite them in alphabetical order.

Renée Habib was born in Casablanca, into a French Sephardic Jewish family who emigrated into Morocco just after the world conflict of 1914—1918. Graduating from high school with her baccalaureate in 1943, the world was again at war. Although a talented pianist and basketball player—as well as a swimmer, which talent she shares with her co-awardee—she already wanted to study medicine, although there was no family tradition: her father was a businessman and her parents wanted her to become a teacher like her mother. However, France was occupied and there was no University in Morocco to attend, so she could only work as an army nurse. Finally in 1945, when the war ended, she went to Paris to study medicine, which she did under the direction of Professor Robert Debré, who encouraged her career in pediatrics and pathology. In 1949 she married a brilliant young Tunisian student, Elio Habib, who became a distinguished and well-known pediatrician, and their first child was born the following year; nevertheless, she qualified in 1953 and the arrival of two more children did not blunt her determination to progress in her medical career, through the medium of becoming an investigator in pathology with the French national research organization, INSERM, then in its infancy. She spent three important months studying pediatric pathology in London with Professor Martin Bodian at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street.

When Professor Debré retired in 1957 the young Dr. Habib decided to join the pediatric team of Professor Pierre Royer at the Hôpital Necker-Enfants Malades in Paris as a pathologist, a post she continued to occupy until 1992.

It is difficult to find a nephrologist, whether pediatrician or internist, who has not come into contact and been influenced positively by Renée Habib. Her career began just as the new tool of needle renal biopsy was helping form and advance nephrology, and she played a major role in the establishment and validation of this technique; one must remember that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, most pathologists were deeply suspicious of this “new” technique, and doubted whether the seemingly minute fragments of renal tissue obtained by probing nephrologists could have diagnostic or prognostic value. That is now a regular routine and respected part of nephrology, and is to a major extent the outcome of the work of our two awardees today.

Although initially “handicapped” on the international stage by having French as her first language, she gave her first paper in English in 1961, and many here can testify that she can hold her own in English better than most native English speakers! Immediately thereafter she attained international celebrity, and I remember vividly my first encounters with her, more than 30 years ago. She published her first paper in 1954, and her first on renal disease the following year (on what is now called polyangiitis). It is difficult now to remember that her first paper in English (apart from the CIBA Foundation symposium in 1961) was in fact her 100th publication, as long as 15 years later in 1969. It is regrettable that the excellent book she co-edited with her maître, Pierre Royer, together with Henri Mathieu and Michel Broyer, and which ran to several editions, was never translated into English. During and ever since this early period, her output of papers has been enormous and of the highest quality, and continues up to this year. One cannot list all her innovations in the tiny space available, but I need say only that she has influenced thinking in every area in which pathology is of importance, both morphological and experimental, especially the study of the nephrotic syndrome, of glomerulopathies in general, and of inherited renal disorders.

Renée Habib’s influence has been huge, and has extended well outside pediatrics, and internists as well came to learn from this talented and intellectually formidable, but delightful and accessible Frenchwoman. She played a major role and was a founding member in the organization of all the international meetings and societies which helped form pediatric nephrology during the 1960s (Paris 1961, International Study of Kidney Disease in Children 1966, European Society for Paediatric Nephrology 1967, International Pediatric Nephrology Association 1968) and has held office.
Cameron: Presentation of the Hamburger Award

Fig. 1. Jean Hamburger together with his long-term collaborator and pupil, Renée Habib, at the first Actualités Néphrologiques de l'Hôpital Necker meeting in 1961. Hugh de Wardener, President of the ISN for 1975–1978, sits between them.

with distinction in all of these. Fluent in Spanish as well as English, she made a major contribution, from the 1960s until today, to the development of nephrology throughout Latin America.

The Hamburger award is, of course, not the first award she has received: in 1988 she received the J.P. Peters award of the American Society of Nephrology, the International Medal of the National Kidney Foundation in 1992, and was on the Council of the ISN for nine years. She achieved supreme honor nationally by receiving the Légion d'Honneur, awarded by the President of France, François Mitterrand, in 1988. However, I am sure that the most important award for her has been the continuing excellent work of those who worked with her and were trained by her all over the world as well as in Paris: the mark of a really distinguished teacher is the legacy she leaves behind, and the “équipe Habib” is second to none.

I now turn to our second Hamburger awardee, Priscilla Kincad-Smith. Again she did not follow her career in her country of birth, which was, in her case, South Africa. She came from a Johannesburg family which had produced four dentists, including her father, although her great-grandfather was a doctor. At school she was a notable sportswoman, in field sports in which she toured Europe as captain of a Universities hockey team, but above all in swimming, in which she achieved an international representation.

She left school intending to take a degree in physical education, but having taken a BSc in biology with this in mind (publishing her first paper in 1947), she ended up by studying medicine at the University of Witwaterstrand (Wits), graduating in 1950. Two years working in general medicine at Baragwanath Hospital followed, in the then-segregated black Johannesburg suburb of Soweto, where she had to deal with every imaginable disease, but enjoyed every minute of the struggle to do clinical medicine under such difficult conditions.

In 1953, as all Australian doctors of ambition did at that time, she came to the United Kingdom, where she worked at the embryonic Royal Postgraduate Medical School, which had been started in 1940, and is still housed in the same old poor-law hospital in Hammersmith on the western periphery of London. There, Jack (Sir John) McMichael was welding together a school of crucial importance not only to British medicine, but also to medicine worldwide. As well as working with Malcolm Milne, Priscilla trained first in pathology and histopathology while there, skills she continues to use up to this day; I have the impression that she is never happier than at the microscope. Later she returned to the clinical side as a cardiologist and published with Barlow a paper describing for the first time the syndrome of the prolapsing mitral valve. With McMichael, among others, she also published landmark papers on hypertension and the kidney still cited and read frequently. Her knowledge of both pathology and clinical medicine, gained from doing post mortems, echoes the training of physicians in the nineteenth century, and permitted her a unique understanding of clinical research. While at the Hammersmith Hospital, she learned in 1956 how to do renal biopsies from Bob Muehrcke, who was on a years’ leave at the RPGMS from Chicago, and put this skill to ample use on her return to Australia. At this time she also developed her interest in bacteriuria and renal scarring, and much of her output for the next decade related to these two topics.

While in London, she met her future husband, Ken Fairley, and went with him when he returned to Melbourne, Australia in 1958.

Fig. 2. Renée Habib in 1967 at the meeting in London which launched the International Study of Kidney Disease in Childhood, and subsequently the ESPN, ASPN and IPNA.
At first, she had no clinical post and worked only in a research capacity, but despite adding twins to her family, was able to continue working and get an appointment in medicine at the Alfred Hospital, and then at the Department of Medicine at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, with which she was associated until 1991, having been appointed Chief of Nephrology in 1965 and to a personal Chair in Medicine in 1975. Today, allegedly retired, she continues to contribute to clinical research.

It is easy to say that Priscilla Kincaid-Smith has contributed to almost every area of nephrology, but it is difficult to grasp the breadth and depth of her contribution to glomerular diseases, pyelonephritis and reflux nephropathy, hypertension and the kidney, analgesic nephropathy, pregnancy and renal disease, cystic disease, and transplantation medicine (the list is almost endless); a survey of her own contributions formed a major part of a Festschrift of Kidney International in 1993 (Vol 44, Suppl 42). What is more, she has aided others in gaining an understanding of these subjects though organizing a series of meetings on these topics. The two meetings she put together with Tim Mathew in 1972 and 1979 on glomerulonephritis were crucial to our development of ideas on glomerular disease, and I remember well the excitement of these occasions. The series of meetings on renal scarring were also the most important events in this area of inquiry at the time.

Her written research output is, in the real sense of the word, awesome: over 500 papers, almost all published in respected journals, a series of a dozen or so books either edited from the meetings she organized or penned with clarity and insight, including a beautiful atlas of renal pathology written together with John Dowling.

She has occupied most of the senior posts available to a physician and nephrologist. As well as President of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology, she has been President of the Australasian College of Physicians, the Asian Pacific Society of Nephrology, the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy, and of course in 1972 she became the fifth President of the International Society of Nephrology itself.

She was invested as a Companion of the British Empire (CBE) by the Queen in 1975, and was awarded the highest civilian honor in Australia, the Order of Australia, in 1987.

One cannot finish her citation without mentioning another two of Priscilla's great loves. The first is teaching: she has been responsible for the polishing and postgraduate training of nephrologists from all over the Asian Pacific area, which owes her an enormous debt. In this area she is still active, both as an individual and on behalf of the ISN. The second is the cattle farm that she
and Ken have at Apollo Bay near Melbourne. A visit there is mandatory for all visiting nephrologists. It has occupied many of her happiest hours for several decades, and continues to do so.

I will conclude by making two general points. Both our Hamburger awardees today are women, and it must be difficult for many in the audience in 1997 to realize what both of them had to overcome before they could accomplish any career in medicine, much less two achievements of such supreme distinction. In the 1950s, despite the work of many pioneers over a century or so, women were barely accepted in medicine; for example, in my own hospital in London (Guy’s) only accepted women as students for the first time in 1951! Parents were often opposed to the idea of a daughter going into medicine; marriage and the arrival of children presented pressures and conflicts that most men can only imagine. It now seems incredible, but in the 1950s in both the United Kingdom and Australia, for women marriage led to automatic compulsory retirement from most public posts, including teaching. There was—and sadly persists to some extent today—a disbelief that women can successfully fill the senior posts of medicine or other organizations. Priscilla herself has spoken eloquently of these difficulties in the videotape interview she made for the Video Legacy program of the ISN. The best demonstration of how inaccurate these ideas have been are the careers of the two Hamburger awardees honored today. Both have been admirable role models for those who have followed them into the highest echelons of nephrology and medicine.

Finally, it is an old cliché to say that behind every great man stands a great woman. Both our Hamburger awardees today have enjoyed long and successful marriages, with a rewarding family life and several children, as well as pursuing their own very successful careers. It takes exceptional men to be husbands to such women. Elio Habib and Ken Fairley have achieved not only professional success in their own right: Ken as a nephrologist himself will be known to almost everyone here, and Elio is best known to nephrologists not through his work on pediatric liver disease, but through his enthusiastic participation at national and international meetings. Their extra reward and challenge has been to cherish and sustain the two outstanding women we honor today; our thanks and respect are due to them as well.