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GERALD D. SCHMIDT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A GRADUATE STUDENT

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I first heard the name “Dr. Gerald D. Schmidt” when I took my second parasitology class at Oregon State University (OSU). The book that our instructor chose to use was, of course, the first edition of Schmidt and Roberts’ *Foundations of Parasitology*. This introductory text to parasitology was far easier to read and comprehend than other popular books on the subject that were available at the time (1977). I knew this because I had purchased all of the parasitology books that were available on the bookshelves at the bookstore and tried to read them during the course. Because of his book, even before I met him, I had been able to delve into his way of thinking. I also knew something of what he looked like because his photograph is in the cover pages of a small but very forward-looking book called *Problems in Systematics of Parasites* (University Park Press, 1967) that was available in the OSU Library.

Becoming a student of Gerald D. Schmidt was due directly to the influence of Robert L. Rausch. In 1979 I asked Dr. Rausch whom he thought I should choose to work under for my master’s degree. He suggested that I apply to graduate school at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), where Dr. Schmidt was a pillar of the faculty in the Department of Biological Sciences. Dr. Rausch stated that Jerry was “one of the best young people in the field of systematics of helminths.”

Arriving for the first time at the office of Dr. Schmidt, I was interested in the array of things outside his office. Immediately to the left of his office (and laboratory) door was a big walk-in cage filled with someone else’s debris. On the right side I was amazed to see a whole 20-gallon fish tank with egg cartons on the bottom and hundreds of cockroaches standing around waving their antennae as they ate the dry dog food lying on the top of the egg cartons. Of course there was a lid on top of the fish tank. Later I was to discover that several research projects and at least 1 doctorate in parasitology resulted directly from research on nematodes infecting the

cockroaches living in the colony outside Schmidt’s door. . . . I found Dr. Schmidt sitting at his desk talking about morphology of cestodes with a student who was trying hard to make measurements and a drawing of one (I think that it was a *Tetrabothrius*) at his research microscope in the back of the laboratory-office (Fig. 1). In responding to the question of the student, he said something like “. . . just look at the worm, its morphology does not lie, the structure is either there or it isn’t.” I introduced myself, made a comment on the funny smell that seemed to permeate the place (turned out that it was beechwood creosote), and let him know that I finally had arrived in Greeley and needed some laboratory space.

Research in the UNC library was great because one of Dr. Schmidt’s good friends was the research librarian, and almost all of the journals needed to pursue research on helminths of vertebrates were available. The complete run of Helminthological Abstracts was available in the library with those of the most current 10 yr kept in the office of Dr. Schmidt. In Dr. Schmidt’s laboratory, working on diversity of helminths from a morphological perspective was an absolute pleasure. His greatest love was Acanthocephala, and this was evident when I pulled out the specimens that I had collected from the small intestine of a road-killed great horned owl, from Oregon. We proceeded to identify them, and it took only an hour to get them to the correct species (*Centrorhynchus conspectus*). This was the first thorny-headed worm that I had ever collected or identified from a wild animal. We did this numerous times during the next 10–17 mo while we identified specimens ranging from trematodes from an osprey to acanthocephalans from African fishes. The memory of our collaborative investigations, wading through stacks of new and old reprints from the files from up on the shelves in his laboratory never will be forgotten. Any student or colleague who was fortunate enough to work with Dr. Schmidt will have a similar memory of the completeness of

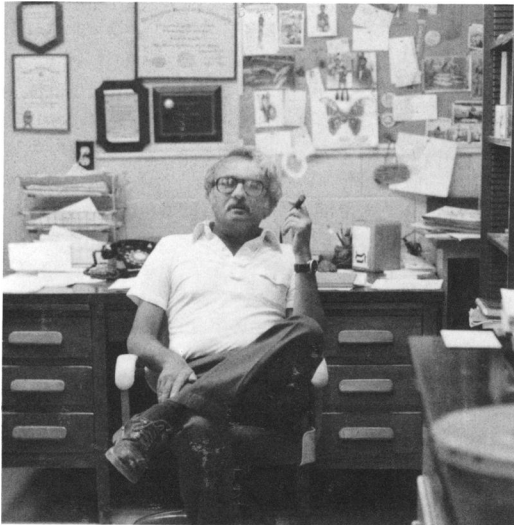


FIGURE 1. Gerald Schmidt in his office at the University of Northern Colorado.

those files and the great fun that was had as an identification was confirmed.

Dr. Schmidt was a true scholar and teacher. His love of helminths and of parasitology in general was highly infectious, especially for those who studied parasites. Dr. Schmidt was a professor who always was ready to look through the microscope at whatever stained or unstained worm we might have been trying to measure or identify. Usually the method that he used for identification (at least it seemed to me) was to pick up a 1-dram glass vial filled with cestodes or some other helminth, peer at it for a minute, state the genus of cestode, and say "probably *this* species." Interestingly, he was almost always correct, at least to the level of the genus, although it took a concerted effort by myself (usually a couple of weeks) to stain, clear, mount, and finally key out the specimens. In 1982, we still used the little book called *How to Know the Tapeworms* published by Schmidt because the large *Handbook of Tapeworm Identification* was still in the manuscript and literature-searching stages. There was a standing joke that he was not Russian even though we always were using "Schmidt's-key."

One of the most memorable experiences that we shared was during the annual spring "Bio Bash" or picnic on the lawn outside Ross Hall on the UNC campus. As members and friends of the biology department we were all consuming what seemed to be vast quantities of liquid re-

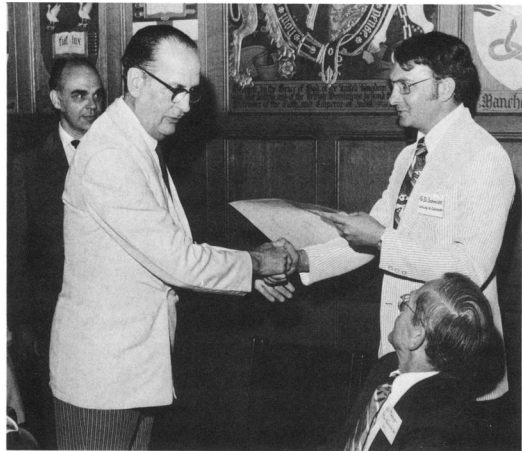


FIGURE 2. Gerald Schmidt receiving the 1973 Ward Medal. From left, Wilbur L. Bullock, Chair, ASP Awards Committee, Justus F. Mueller, ASP President, Schmidt, and William Trager, ASP President-elect (foreground).

freshments as we waited for the hot dogs and hamburgers to be served. A small brown dog happened to be hanging around looking for some scraps of hot dog when both Jerry and I noticed a string of proglottids hanging out of its anus. As we watched and commented on the neat parasitological phenomenon that was unfolding, the dog proceeded to scrape his anal area along on a nice stretch of green grass. The proglottids were deposited there and the dog left the area. Immediately thereafter, an unmentioned high-ranking official of UNC sat on the same area of nice green grass. When he stood and walked away, he became an unwitting phoretic host for the cestode *Dipylidium caninum*; nobody ever told him what he was carrying around.

Dr. Schmidt worked harder than most people both to teach classes and to publish. Each semester he personally taught 3 full lecture courses and all of the laboratory sections. He was in Ross Hall some nights as late as the graduate students. During research on a taxonomic group, he would place a specimen on the research microscope, start a drawing, and then go off to teach a laboratory section for an hour and a half. When he came back, the worm was exactly where he had left it and he resumed his work. He would even run back down to his office during breaks in the laboratory session to peer at the specimens and perhaps write a few more comments regarding the morphological characteristics of the worms. He also served as Secretary-Treasurer of the

American Society of Parasitologists and received little "off time" from teaching to pursue this important work.

Dr. Schmidt was an outstanding teacher. He taught classes (including all laboratories as there were no teaching assistants at UNC) in topics as diverse as general zoology, general entomology, medical entomology, parasitology, field parasitology, medical parasitology, and histology. His method of lecturing was to impart knowledge to the students by providing interesting examples of the topic at hand, thus reinforcing the main points. He was good at delivering complete life cycles (with associated drawings and fascinating digressions) without referring to his notes during the lecture. He treated his graduate students as colleagues and encouraged students to publish results of their studies as soon as possible after completion of the research. Students working in the laboratory of Dr. Schmidt worked late, they worked hard, and they were productive. His standing rule for graduate students was that the majority of their work had to be submitted for publication before the student was allowed to graduate.

One of the honors that Dr. Schmidt cherished most was receipt of the Henry Baldwin Ward Medal (Fig. 2). Many a Friday night after a late FAC in Greeley, we would end up at the apartment of Dr. Schmidt and conversation would turn toward current trends in parasitology, taxonomy, and even cladistics. Ideas and thoughts would flow freely and many times he commented on the extremely great honor he felt at receiving this medal. After the first time at Dr. Schmidt's place, I knew where he kept his *medal* displayed and, more often than not, I would remove it from its velvet case to hold and examine both sides.

When we went into the field together I always learned an immense amount. We would travel to his cabin in the front range of the Rockies and collect pocket gophers, have dinner, and generally relax. He knew the taxonomic names of all of the plants, all of the birds, most of the mammals, and many of the invertebrates that we encountered during our walks. Most of the time when we would walk through the woods, he would joke that we were "Questing for Ticks," which we often were, in an indirect sort of way.

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