

David Charles Jeremy Bassett

February 21, 1930 – March 10, 2014



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David Charles Jeremy Bassett, bacteriologist, who worked in London, Trinidad and Tobago, Singapore and Honk Kong, died in Trinidad on March 10, 2014.

David Bassett was born February 21, 1930 to Reginald John and Pauline Margaret Bassett in Southampton, England. Two boys were born to this union – David and a younger brother who died of pneumonia at nine years. He was very close and very affectionate with this brother. His brother's death was to seal his fate to his life's calling for he decided that he wanted to study infectious diseases. His father Reginald was a bank manager and was constantly travelling so young David was placed in a boarding school. He finished high school at 14 years. Following his graduation from high school, he got a job as a laboratory technician in microbiology. He then served with the British Army Medical Corps in Germany as a laboratory technician where he became adept in phlebotomy. His supervisor told him one day that he was not suited for the army and that he should go to medical school. He did go to medical school, but not before attaining an "Associate in Bacteriology" from the Institute of Biomedical Sciences.

It was while he was in medical school that he met and married Marilyn "Bunty" Downton and from this union three children were born: Stephen, Judi and James (deceased in 1994). In medical school, he did not like obstetrics and gynaecology and consequently did not initially pass this aspect of the programme. Funding for his medical education therefore came to an end, but he had a young family to support so he took a job as an "orderly" in a hospital to earn some money. The story is told that doctors and technicians

in the hospital where he worked knew of his adeptness in taking blood samples and when they were having difficulty in finding the veins of their patients they would call on "orderly David" for assistance. He did finish medical school at the University of London in 1958, earning his MB BS while at the same time taking the prize for pathology.

The next two years saw him working at Whipps Cross Hospital and John and Elizabeth Hospital as a Registrar. Then, in 1960, he moved to Guy's Hospital where he was a trainee bacteriologist, remaining there until 1962. From 1962 to 1965, he was Senior Registrar at the Wrexham Hospital Group in Wales. It was from Wrexham that he came to the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory in October 1965 as an external member of the scientific staff of the UK Medical Research Council. He arrived in the middle of a large outbreak of acute glomerulonephritis in south Trinidad which had started in 1964 and lasted until 1966. David was shifted there to work with Dr Theo Poon-King with a grant from the UK Medical Research Council. At first, he visited the hospitals in San Fernando, Port-of-Spain and Arima, but toward the middle of 1966, researchers from Northwestern University in Chicago established a Streptococcal Disease Unit in San Fernando with Dr Poon-King, and David confined his work to the Port-of-Spain General Hospital, collaborating with Drs John Arneaud, M McDowall and R Ramkissoon. In his work, he also collaborated with Dr MT Parker of the Central Public Health Laboratory in Colindale to whom he sent some of the isolates of *Streptococcus pyogenes* he had obtained in Trinidad. David had isolated and Dr Parker had identified M-type 49 and two new types: M-type 55 and M-type 57 during the outbreak. His work in Trinidad has been published in internationally recognized journals.

David returned to London in 1968 where he worked at the Central Public Health Laboratory and the Cross-Infection Reference Laboratory as Senior Bacteriologist until 1972. In 1972, he moved from the Central Public Health Laboratory to the Institute of Child Health, University of London as Senior Lecturer in bacteriology while being Honorary Consultant Microbiologist to the Great Ormond Street Hospital Group, London. He stayed there until 1976 when he accepted an offer as Medical Officer of Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) to work as a bacteriologist at the new Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC).

At CAREC, bacteriology was a new entity so he had to start from the beginning, setting up a new laboratory which became a proficient and efficient unit of CAREC. David also became head of the laboratory division of CAREC which included bacteriology, virology and medical entomology and parasitology. His duty as Head of Laboratories was to ensure

that all sections were running smoothly and this he did. In 1977, The University of the West Indies medical students at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital came to CAREC to do their clinical medical clerkships and David was in charge of that programme. It was a tribute to his leadership that the students spoke in high praises and value of the programme. Sometimes, when the Director of CAREC was away, he acted as Director, but the longest stint as Acting Director was when Dr Peter Diggory died in February 1988 to the arrival of Dr Franklin White in September 1989.

David spent about 12 years in Trinidad, perhaps the longest in any one institution, leaving in 1989 to go to the other end of the world to Singapore and Hong Kong. In Singapore, he worked at the National University of Singapore from 1989 to 1991 as a Teacher Fellow and from 1991 to 1995 as Visiting Senior Lecturer to the Chinese University of Hong Kong. While he was in Singapore, he became an Associate Consultant to the National University Hospital and in Hong Kong as Consultant Microbiologist to the Hong Kong Hospital Authority. He returned to the UK in

1995, perhaps to retire, but he was still writing scientific articles and his legacy lives on with the many scientific articles he published in international peer-reviewed journals. David was married twice. He was separated from his first wife Marilyn Downton and while he was in Trinidad on his second stint he met Seraphina and married her in 1984. This union produced two children: Nicholas, born in Trinidad, and Naomi, born in Hong Kong. All of David's children have done well in their chosen profession.

David was a competent and dedicated worker who got along well with his colleagues. He was a humble individual and had an easy going style. He fitted in easily with all social groups. He leaves to mourn his wife Seraphina, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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