

In Memoriam: Wayne Alfred Hening, MD, PhD (1945–2008)



A gifted scholar and a kind, compassionate gentleman who “always thought outside the box”... these words aptly describe Wayne Hening, MD, PhD. Wayne Alfred Hening was born on January 29, 1945 and died a premature death at the height of his career on September 15, 2008 at the age of 63 years after a brief but valiant struggle with pulmonary fibrosis and its complications. The world of sleep medicine has lost one of its pioneers.

A creative genius of seemingly unlimited knowledge matched by widely diverse interests, Dr. Hening demonstrated in his writings and critiques above all a disarming, even brutal intellectual honesty fortunately blended with a gentle, considerate soul. His life in some ways reflected the cultural conflicts between a German father demanding precision and a Polish mother nurturing relaxed acceptance. His writings and thoughts reflected his father’s passion for precision, his often chaotic and unpredictable life style his mother’s trusting acceptance. He represents that generation of gifted young men of the American Eastern establishment who left home at an early age to be educated in the best

of the boarding school traditions of the 19th and 20th centuries. He entered Yale in 1963 on what was to be a three-year course to graduation, which instead became a four-year journey of self-discovery. His graduating classes (because he changed years he curiously had two of these) included both George W. Bush and Joe Lieberman. He graduated from Yale in 1968 earning a degree in Social Science and he was awarded a Fulbright fellowship for a year’s study in Europe. Much of that year he spent climbing the mountains of Europe, but he also completed a course of literature critique on O’Neil.

He decided to undertake the study of medicine and was one of the early participants in combined MD, PhD studies at New York University. He received his MD in 1978, interned in internal medicine at Stanford (1978–1979), and completed a residency in Neurology at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical center along with his PhD in neurobiology both in 1982. He was board certified in neurology, sleep medicine, clinical neurophysiology and electrodiagnostic medicine. He became a research associate at the Center for Neurobiology and Behavior at New York State Psychiatric Institute. At the time, the full expression of the first work on the sea slug, *aplysia*, allowed analyses in intact animals of synaptic connections modified by learning. Dr. Hening worked on the cellular basis of coordinated defensive behaviors in the *aplysia* under the guidance of Dr. Kandel’s, a year 2000 Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine. He contributed extensively to an excellent article on long-term sensitization of a motor reflex (second author to Dr. Harold Pinsker and co-author to Dr. Eric Kandel) and wrote a significant article on motor-neuronal control of *aplysia* locomotion. His contributions in studies of the *aplysia* earned him a specific reference by name in Dr. Kandel’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech. This laboratory work set the stage for his developing clinical interest in the new neurological field of movement disorders.

Dr. Hening became a clinical fellow in the Movement Disorder Group under Dr. Stanley Fahn, who later

became President of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN), and studied basic human motor control in the laboratory of Dr. Claude Ghez.

He continued his scholarly pursuits and an active research program when he came to Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Lyons, New Jersey and Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center, New Brunswick, NJ, to join two of us (S.C., A.W.) in 1986 first as a Research Associate and later as a Clinical Investigator. After a brief period in understanding motor problems of Parkinson's disease he zeroed in on pursuing a condition which was then little known to the profession – Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS). Dr. Hening raised the standard of RLS research to its highest level because of his persistence, diligence, intelligence, careful probing and, above all, his sheer vision. Ten years later he moved to Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center as a research consultant to join one of us (R.A.) and Dr. Christopher Earley to continue his fruitful research in RLS. The rest is history. Despite numerous contributions in neurology, clinical neurophysiology and sleep medicine, Wayne's lasting legacy will be his work on RLS. He was able to explore every aspect of RLS (clinical studies, therapeutic trials, epidemiological, circadian, imaging and genetic studies) in collaboration with his numerous colleagues. Together with one of us (A.W.) he organized the first international symposium on RLS in 1994. He made the most original contributions in developing RLS diagnostic scales, international RLS diagnostic criteria and validation of the scales. Dr. Hening made substantial contributions to professional education by lecturing widely in the areas of movement disorders and sleep and RLS, and organized courses, symposia and discussion groups. At his death he was the chair of the sleep section of the AAN, secretary of the International Restless Legs Syndrome Study Group (IRLSSG) and the committee chairs of bylaws and national council of the World Association of Sleep Medicine (WASM). He was one of the driving forces in founding the international journal *Sleep Medicine* in 2000 and WASM in 2003, and he was also an Associate Editor of *Sleep Medicine*. Dr. Hening published extensively and edited and co-edited several books. His short monograph as the senior editor on clinical management of RLS is a gem. His last book as the senior editor with two of us (R.A., S.C.) and Dr. Earley, *Restless Legs Syndrome*, is in press and due to be

published by Elsevier in 2009. He edited another book with two of us (S.C., A.W.), *Sleep and Movement Disorders*, the first of its kind in the field.

Wayne was fascinated by different cultures and was an energetic and indefatigable world traveler. Those of us who were fortunate enough to accompany him on his various explorations – whether in North and South India visiting temples and cultural centers, China, Thailand and renowned cultural centers of Europe – were guaranteed an unforgettable, enchanting and illuminating experience ending with hope and promise. Wayne Hening was truly a giant of a man, an avid reader not only of medical science but also of literature, art, philosophy and poetry and a connoisseur of wine and food.

We will conclude by citing the last verse of Wayne's poem (*Sleep Med* 2007;9:94) composed while visiting Rumi's tomb in May 2006:

*Rumi, I'm told, looked to death
as a marriage, so here
we celebrate with him and partake
of his gestures, dancing along,
if only with hidden steps
caught in the sunburst
shock of his poetry,
his verses like a subtle knife
cutting through the buzzing air
of the market
to open a window into
a deeper world*

These words capture eloquently Wayne's philosophy on death and dying. He soared high in thought but engaged deeply in the joys of life. His dual physical and spiritual life opens in him the superconscious ("The Very Self") state. His human form departed, but his soul flies high with his usual boundless vigor, energy and brilliance – indestructible, fathomless, a deeper world. Wayne will be sorely missed by his family, friends, colleagues and younger generations inspired by him throughout the world. He was an internationalist and a man for all seasons.

Sudhansu Chokroverty
Richard Allen
Arthur Walters