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**IN MEMORIAM ROMAN MYKYTOWYCZ
(1921-1996)**

He and I were friends since 1969, a few years after my wife Ludmilla and I had come to live in Canberra. Micky, as I had come to call him after many years of “pane Roman”, was born on 15 July 1921, was 20 years older and already an eminent scientist when I was in the early stages and in a different field, but the commonality of our training in science as well as our Ukrainian background drew us together. He was one of the few immigrants of the immediate post-war migration to make an outstandingly successful professional career in Australia, and his passing on 18 June 1996 was recorded for the general Australian public by an obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (29.8.96), perhaps the first such for a Ukrainian settler of his generation. Other tributes in English and Ukrainian have appeared, most notably the fine one in Ukrainian of our mutual friend, Mr. M. Malecky (*Tserkva i Zhyttia*, 8.7.96; *Vilna Dumka*, 21.7.96) which covers all the main features of his life. What follows is a personal memoir. I write in English, partly because aspects of Micky’s work are then more easily treated, but mainly in the hope of keeping the memory of this remarkable man alive among future readers of Ukrainian descent or inclination.

I was in Paris when he died, and did not return until after his funeral. Just a week before his death I had sent him a postcard, writing in our mutual bantering style “No funny business, now, Micky, till I get back”, but I don’t think it reached him in time. I thought of him then in the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of St. Vladimir-Le-Grand, and in the great church of St. Sulpice, from which had been buried another modest hero of science, Irene-Jules Bienaymé (1796-1878), the 200th anniversary of whose birth I had come to help commemorate.

Over the years, Micky and I had been closely associated through the Shevchenko Scientific Society Branch in Canberra, and also in the initial stages of the building of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of St. Volodymyr there. After I moved to Sydney in 1979, our contact continued through the work of the Society - of which he was Head for Australia from 1981 - especially its Conferences on History of Ukrainian Settlement in Australia. I

frequently returned to Canberra to see my Ukrainian friends and university colleagues, and during these brief visits I generally stayed at his home. We disagreed at times, but spent many pleasant hours in conversation from our different standpoints, and many happy times in the company of the Malecky and Mondzheyovsky families. I liked his pragmatic approach to situations where I had often encountered prejudice, and his reluctance to push himself as regards his own very substantial scientific discoveries. (At one time, for example, he had been mentioned as a candidate for election to the Australian Academy of Science, but he let the matter drop.) Micky's personal priorities were different.

Roman Mykytowycz began his tertiary studies at the Veterinary Institute in L'viv in 1939, after completing his secondary studies at the "filia" of the Ukrainian Academic Gymnasium in this city of his birth. As a result of the onset of war, he emigrated to Germany where he graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Leipzig. He received the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Munich University in 1948. Having arrived in Australia in September 1949, for a time he worked in Sydney at Fowlers Potteries and Pipe Factory, Marrickville, for a basic wage of £8.6.0 per week, plus overtime. Here, as he said, he developed respect for manual labour. He joined the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization), specifically its Wildlife Survey Section, at the invitation of Francis Ratcliffe in June 1950, where his first appointment was as Technical Assistant, stationed at the State Veterinary Research Laboratory at Glenfield, where he was responsible for the production of myxomatosis virus to provide infectious material for field trials. He moved to Canberra in June 1951, and remained with the CSIRO at the Headquarters of the Division of Wildlife Research till his retirement on 14 July 1986, as Senior Principal Research Scientist. In the period July- September 1982 he was Acting Chief of Division. Over his career he published over 70 items on a variety of biological subjects, most specifically on the wild rabbit. From its inception in January 1975, he was on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Chemical Ecology*. Beginning in about 1968, he was invited to speak at many international meetings, travelled widely, and established continuing friendships all over the world. Over 70 relatives, friends, former and current colleagues attended a dinner in his honour on his retirement, on Saturday 19 July 1986, at the Yowani Country Club in Canberra, where I was privileged to speak on the Ukrainian side of his life, unknown to most of those present.

I had asked Micky several times, as the years passed, to fill in some of the personal details in the above “official” story. The last time that we spoke of it was at his home in Canberra on Monday 8 April this year, in the company of Dr. Ihor Hordiev (Gordijew). Those days of the Latin Easter were the last that I saw him. The following notes derive from how he responded to some of our questions, and from earlier conversations.

In Sydney Micky had applied for a job to Douglas Stewart, Head of CSIRO’s McMaster Laboratory on the campus of Sydney University, who had directed him to Charles Birch, then Senior Lecturer and later an eminent Sydney University professor. Birch, directing him to Francis Ratcliffe, wrote: “...you will be fortunate to have him...he is a splendid fellow, keen, well-mannered and friendly...he has a very fine personality, is gracious and good-looking as well!”. Ratcliffe’s group was beginning virological studies on rabbits. Micky’s first scientific breakthrough (as a Technical Assistant!) occurred in 1952; he discovered an attenuated strain of myxomatosis virus. Ratcliffe did not at first realize the significance of this discovery, but mentioned it to Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnet (who did) at a conference. This was followed by quick publication (1953) by Micky in the prestigious British scientific journal *Nature*, and was followed by a series of quick promotions, aided by the incongruous fact that such a junior staff member held the senior qualification of Doctor of Veterinary Science. In this the Australian sense of fair play and recognition of, and reward for, talent were at their best. Professor Frank Fenner had come to Canberra at about this time, in the early days of the Australian National University when it was a purely research institution, and had put two PhD students onto Micky’s breakthrough idea; its development led to much credit for his group. Eventually there was a book by the two chiefs: F. Fenner and F.N. Ratcliffe (1965) *Myxomatosis*, published by Cambridge University Press. Micky’s copy has the inscription: “Roman Mykytowycz in gratitude and appreciation from Francis Ratcliffe, December 1965”. An interesting group photo includes a youngish Micky in characteristic attitude.

As the virology work was coming to an end, Micky felt that he needed to find a niche for himself in work which was not in competition with that of his colleagues. He noticed the gland on chins of rabbits which led to his second breakthrough, in the early 1960’s, on rabbits’ sense of smell. Indeed, his response to the question of what he regarded as the highlight of his career was: an invitation to write an expository article for the *Scientific American*. This

was published under the title “Territorial Marking by Rabbits” as pp.116-126, in May 1968, as part of Volume 218. His international reputation now rests on his study of odiferous glands and olfaction. At his death he was an acknowledged expert on chemical communication in animals; this was the reason for many of the invitations that he received to speak.

Micky’s own research directions had been influenced by that of the German biologist Konrad Z. Lorenz on the universality of innate animal aggression. I learned this when in 1989 I gave him an old copy of Lorenz’s popular early book *King Solomon’s Ring* (1952). Animal aggression and territoriality are related themes of Robert Ardrey’s popular book *The Territorial Imperative* (1967). When I brought this up, Micky recalled meeting Ardrey, who expressed regret about not knowing about the work on territoriality among rabbits at time of writing. In one of his own publications, perhaps his last, Micky, too, sought to emphasize the similarity between man and other animals in the use of the sense of smell for communication; this article (1985) is titled “Olfaction - a link with the past”.

Micky’s scientific success was due to his keen powers of observation, lateral thinking and curiosity. He was self-reliant and independent, and was helped by colleagues who facilitated his work and progress.

He loved to visit his friends overseas, many from L’viv days. On several occasions I was present at these gatherings where he would play the guitar and the evening would be filled with recollections of times past, laughter, and the songs of prewar western Ukraine. He enjoyed arranging meetings with me overseas, at which he always took the opportunity to exercise his talents as a photographer; and one of his last letters enumerated the places: Chicago, Los Angeles, Rome, London, Charlottesville, New York... “One could write a book about it”, he said, and added in his wry way “but who would publish it, and above all, who would want to read it?” My reflections on his passing brought to mind some lines from a poem of Francois Villon, in free translation of which I end this tribute to my friend:

Ask not for them again;
For in time’s passage one can hear
Just this refrain, of what remains:
Where are the snows of yesteryear?

27.9.96. “The Free Thought[Vilna Dumka]”, No. 43 (2406) 23.10.1996.