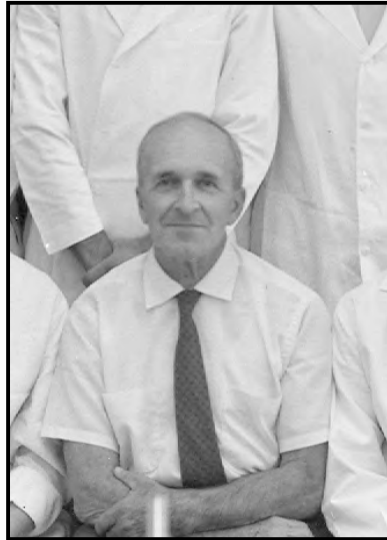


**Let us not forget “DOC”
Stanislas F. Snieszko (1902-1984)**



On January 12, 1984, the fish health world lost a great leader, the foremost figure in the modern era of fish health. This man was not only the leading authority on fish diseases, fish health management and fish health training, but he was also a man of sterling character who touched the hearts of those who knew him. Unfortunately, because he left us more than 25 years ago, many of the younger fish-health professionals know little of “Doc” Snieszko and few recognize the legacy he left us through his significant direct and indirect contributions to the fish health field.

Stanislas F. Snieszko, commonly known as “Doc” by his friends and associates, was born in or near Krakow, Poland on January 28, 1902. He was raised on a large farm that grew a number of different crops, including carp that were cultured in ponds. This farm probably served as the foundation for his interest in fish. He was unusually bright which delighted his parents but he loved pranks and this aspect of his character was received

with less enthusiasm by them. In a light hearted discussion with some scientists in the 1970's, "Doc" admitted to taking a salamander to school and while laying across the desk with arms folded around his head a teacher approached to see if he was sick. He stood up quickly with the salamander attached to his lip and he then chased the teacher around the room, exciting the other students to say the least. Another prank with similar results was executed with a snake that he snuck into school in the sleeve of a coat. Undoubtedly, many other pranks were conceived and carried out by this budding scientist.

From an early age, Stan followed an academic path and selected studies with an emphasis in microbiology. In 1924, he received a Masters degree in biology and chemistry from Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland and in 1926, a PhD in bacteriology and chemistry followed from the same university. In 1928, he served on a Polish government fellowship at Leipzig University. From 1929 to 1932, Dr. Snieszko pursued post-doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin under a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship. In 1932, he returned to Jagiellonian University as head of the Department of Agriculture and Microbiology. Being appointed as department head just 6 yrs after receiving his PhD was a strong indication of the respect that the faculty had for him. From 1932 – 1938, Dr. Snieszko's research took him to England, Italy, as well as back to the University of Wisconsin. During this period, he produced at least 2 publications on the bacterial diseases of fish in Poland, among other things. In 1939, because of the deteriorating political situation across Europe, just prior to WWII, Dr. Snieszko and his wife Julia moved to the US permanently, and it would be almost 40 years before they would return for a single visit to their native country. In August of 1939, "Doc" took a

short-term position as a soil myxobacteriologist under Dr. Breed (Editor of Bergey's Manual) at a field station of Cornell University in Geneva, New York. In November of 1939, Dr. Snieszko took a position at the University of Maine where among other things he studied a new bacterial disease in lobsters.

Many microbiologists, including Snieszko, were brought to Camp Detrick in Frederick, Maryland because of the war effort in the U.S. He became a naturalized citizen at Camp Detrick and was subsequently commissioned as an officer in the Chemical Corps. Before being discharged and returning to civilian life, Dr. Snieszko attained the rank of Captain. Although he was an excellent bacteriologist he did not win any honors in professional soldier protocol.

His interests in fish and microbiology lead him in 1946 to join, and then become director of the Microbiology Laboratory at Leetown, West Virginia. This laboratory later became known as the Eastern Fish Disease Laboratory (EFDL) in 1958 and eventually in 1977 was renamed the National Fish Health Research Laboratory. While under his directorship, the EFDL became one of the most respected and recognized fish health laboratories in the world as Dr. Snieszko hired talented individuals to fill key positions at the Laboratory. Several of these, most notably Drs. Ken Wolf (virologist), Glenn Hoffman (parasitologist) and Pete Bullock (bacteriologist), became world renown in their own rights. Snieszko directed the EFDL until 1972; he was 70 at that time and retirement as director was mandatory. After retiring, "Doc" became a Senior Scientist at the lab until his death in 1984.

During his years at the laboratory (1946-1984), “Doc” Snieszko published more than 200 papers on bacterial diseases and the prevention and control of diseases. His studies have been published in Polish, German, French and English journals. “Doc’s” work contributed greatly to expanding the scope and understanding of fish diseases beyond those held in the mid-1940s, and the predominate parasitological view of diseases that was held for about 150 years (1797 - the late 1940s) was permanently shifted to encompass other etiological agents and environmental factors. “Doc” Snieszko also pioneered work on the use of antibiotics (sulfonimides and nitrofurans) to treat furunculosis in fish, and he was well known for promoting an understanding of the interaction of host, pathogen, and environment in the disease process. He was known for using three circles and their intersection to represent the interaction of the host, pathogen and environment. Because “Doc” was of Polish descent, this diagram became known as the “Polish Three Ring Circus” among his colleagues in the 1970s. “Doc” served as chairman of the Fish Disease Committee (FDC) of the American Fisheries Society for five years; this was the first national fish health organization in the United States. In 1968, the FDC under the direction of Dr. Snieszko was responsible for the first fish disease legislation passed in North America (Code of Federal Register, Title 50, Section 13.7 – no salmonids could be imported with whirling disease or viral hemorrhagic septicemia).

“Doc” also had the foresight to initiate fish health training of biologists and this training, both formal and personal, was well received by professionals in the US as well as

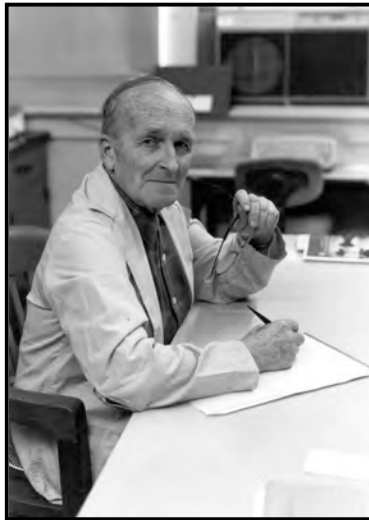
pathologists from 12 other countries. He, along with his staff, trained and mentored fish biologists of the USFWS who later established the Hatchery Biologist System that served as a model for fish disease diagnostic and certification programs of today. Several of these hatchery biologists, most particularly Jim Warren and Ron Geode, were instrumental in the formation of the Fish Health Section of the American Fisheries Society in 1972. Although, “Doc” Snieszko was very committed to training he was sometimes criticized for taking time from research to train people. His response was “there is no point in building the bricks if there is no one to build the houses”.

During his career at Leetown, “Doc” Snieszko was editor of several books that included the very popular T. F. H. Fish Disease Book series (a set of six books) and he also initiated and authored many of the leaflets in the popular Fish Diseases Leaflet series that were a major source of current information for the fish health community from the 1960s and to the 1990s. Additionally, Dr. Snieszko organized symposiums, chaired key meetings, was an invited lecturer at numerous universities and scientific groups, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Journal of Fish Biology. During his career, Dr. Snieszko was presented with numerous awards including the first Fish Health Section S. F. Snieszko Award, USFWS Distinguished Service Award, American Fisheries Society Award of Excellence, Wildlife Disease Association Distinguished Service Award, the Barnett L. Cohen Award of Excellence from the American Society of Microbiology, and an Honorary Doctorate of Science from West Virginia University.

“Doc” was very much a people-oriented person. Only those who knew him could appreciate that part of his character. In talking to several who did, the following list of words or phrases were given to describe his character: good, kind, gentle, mentor, teacher, encourager, humanitarian, listener, empathizer, ambassador, helper, supporter, one who had a great sense of humor, one who easily laughed, highly respected (for some he could do no wrong), and highly recognized. Moreover, Dr. Snieszko always stood behind and encouraged his staff. He saw potential in people and would unobtrusively “push” them, usually by encouraging them to better their education.

“Doc” also loved music, particularly opera. When leaving work prior to attending a performance, he would say “The more you work the more you have to go to work. I have tickets to go to the opera.” and then he would leave. He and his wife Julia were also avid gardeners. “Doc” was a lover of animals and had several pets; his favorite was an “adopted” stray beagle named “Charlie Brown”. He once found an injured robin and carefully nursed it to health and kept it for about 16 years (possibly the longest any robin has been kept in captivity). The robin, named “Birdie” became close to “Doc” and was very jealous of Ms. Snieszko. Dr. Snieszko would not hurt an animal and if a nuisance animal, like a skunk, would show up at his house he would not kill it but would live trap it, photograph it, feed it and then release it in another area hoping it would come back to be caught again. About the only way to get “Doc” upset was to cause an animal undue pain and this included research animals.

So how can we sum up this man's life? Although short in stature, he was a highly respected and recognized fish health authority, who knew not only how to find useful knowledge through his scientific skills but how to give it away as an energetic and compassionate teacher. He gave as much of himself to one as he did to a group of a hundred. His close friends knew him as the "consummate gentleman" and always referred to him as "Doc" - even the PhDs called him "Doc".



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