

county town Mayen. He had to join the youth organization of the Nazis (Hitlerjugend) with lots of sports and he became an altar boy in the Catholic Church, which he enjoyed very much. The nearby presence of the well-known big monastery Maria Laach put a special flavor on the whole area. However, the mood changed with the start of World War 2, although the whole village was even more united during those days and lots of illegal criticism circulated. No Jewish people lived directly in the village but Gerd's family was in contact with some for business reasons. His father had to balance between a very critical thinking and his entrance into the NSDAP party, which he was forced to do due to his engagement in the animal breeding association. People became also aware of the concentration camps but not to the full extent. At this time, Gerd was already influenced and very much impressed by the political thinking of two uncles who emigrated via Luxembourg to the USA in the late 19th century as stonecutter but they returned back home in the early 30's with a bunch of democratic thinking not existing anymore in Germany. One of those uncles trained Gerd in violin, the start of his musical education which he enjoyed very much especially under the guidance of a philosophical teacher. In parallel, his father gave him more insights into the political system, which was heavily criticized especially by his mother. With the news about the first lost soldiers from the area, frequent air alarms and air strikes towards nearby Cologne the war became closer and real in the rural area. Beginning 1944, 15-year-old Gerd was forced to join the military service as anti-aircraft auxiliary involved in air defense against low-flying aircrafts. No doubt, youngsters also enjoyed this but they also got aware of prisoners in devastating physical condition. In January 1945, he received notification to join forces in Krakow Poland, a command he burned with a smoking cigarette. For half a year, he became a war prisoner under American soldiers, a time he found far less ignominious than the period spent as a soldier. When Gerd returned back home, his father had started already to rebuilt some of the destroyed farm buildings and he went ahead to finish his delayed school term in an area now under French occupancy.

University and post graduate education

In 1947, Gerd Monreal completed his school education and started training as apprentice in poultry breeding. Straight afterwards he completed one term in human medicine and in 1949 he started with the long awaited studies in veterinary medicine, in Gießen the closest option to his home village. Poultry diseases were taught on a voluntary basis by Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Karl Fritzsche who was heading the Veterinary Institute of the federal state Rheinland Pfalz. With his great interest in all aspects of poultry health Gerd Monreal must have been the ideal student in a discipline very much neglected. During his studies, he already published an article on antimicrobials as growth promotor in chickens and in 1955 he joined Prof. Fritzsche in his Institute as assistant. His doctorate thesis was about typing of *Mycobacteria* from swine and soon he became the head of the poultry health service at a time of major changes in poultry management characterized by intensifying production. Free-range systems were substituted by in-door housing and cage systems were introduced to improve health and to increase profitability. New genetic lines were established covering the different needs of egg and meat production. In 1961, a new department was founded at the institute supposed to focus on viral infections, a true desire of Gerd Monreal who was nominated to establish it. By this time, Gerd Monreal found his way to adenoviruses, the subject of his *venia legendi*, which he completed in 1967, was entitled "Untersuchungen über ein

Adenovirus". With this achievement, he was enabled to teach autonomously at universities and it was mandatory to get a university chair or professorship. His supervisor at the faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Gießen was Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Rudolf Rott, a virologist very famous for his studies on influenza viruses.

Institute of Poultry Diseases at the Freie Universität Berlin

His experience in establishing a new organization was very helpful when he was appointed Professor by the Freie Universität Berlin in 1969, with the challenge to set up a new Institute for Poultry Diseases. The start was from scratch with nothing available at all, except some nearly empty offices. Negotiations on the basic budget were very successful but the legislation changed requiring universities to put a 50% reduction in place on already signed agreements. Despite this disappointment, the staff situation consisting of scientists, technicians, secretary and cleaner and even washing up personnel to cover the needs of the tissue culture lab with all the glass material was very good. After a short interim period in the former offices of the Institute for Japonology and Sinology the institute relocated to a beautiful villa in one of the most livable neighborhoods in West Berlin. Gerd was charged to adapt the building with low costs as a new institute was to be finished within the next 5 years. Amazingly and not unexpected, the provisory situation lasted until his retirement but was constantly improved. A tissue culture lab replaced a terrace on the first floor and a SPF unit was established under the lawn. Some years later, a lab was installed in the basement which allowed work on genetic engineering with direct access to the beautiful garden. The villa was built in 1923 by the Jewish wine merchant Ignatz Thoman who died in 1939. His wife was deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and after that it became property of the SS. The Freie Universität took it over in 1968 similar to many others, which were privately owned after World War 2 but sold to the university as the political situation of the island West Berlin was considered rather unstable, and numerous wealthy people left the city. Since the Institute of Poultry Diseases moved out in 2004, it became the home of the "Forschungsverbund SED Staat" an association at the Freie Universität Berlin conducting research on the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The smell of his pipe was always a perfect indicator for the presence of Gerd Monreal and fitted nicely with the wooden ceiling of his office and the marble door sticks of the building, it was a luxury place to work but very much impractical not to think about standard health and safety rules.

Due to his expertise, Gerd Monreal was also nominated to teach virology for the first 10 years until the chair for virology was established. At the beginning, a few holdings with poultry were available in West Berlin one with 120,000 laying hens to guarantee a certain basic egg supply for the human population. Such facilities cooperated providing diagnostic samples for bacteriology and histology but the diagnostic activities had to be reduced when the facility closed in the mid 70's and others farms disappeared as well. Shipping diagnostic material from West Germany was logistically not an option. Consequently, the institute focused solely on research and, less surprisingly, on virus infections. First subjects were on vaccination against Marek's disease, infectious bronchitis and Newcastle disease. The upcoming research on Marek's disease at various places and institutions characterized by the development of the first vaccines against the disease brought up the idea of a focused meeting. This meeting took place in 1978 in the Reichstag building directly located at the

Berlin Wall, today the seat of the German Parliament. This very successful meeting was organized by Prof. Dr. Gerd Monreal, Prof. Dr. Peter Biggs and Dr. Jim Payne, both from the Houghton Poultry Research Station in the UK. The meeting was supported by the European Economic Community (EEC), which was later integrated into the European Union. The title of the meeting was “Resistance and Immunity to Marek’s Disease” under the umbrella of a special program “Animal Leukosis” supporting research in the animal sector in EEC countries. It was the first Symposium on Marek’s Disease which became a well-established conference ever since.

With the appearance of the Egg Drop Syndrome Virus, research on adenoviruses was revitalized. Studies followed to explore the interaction between the Avian Adeno-Associated Virus and its helper viruses, herpesvirus of turkeys and fowl adenoviruses. The engagement of a biochemist in the 80ties was very unusual but reflected the visionary thinking of Gerd Monreal. However, being ahead of time was also disadvantageous as the society and public funding were not ready yet for the development of viral vectors for vaccination. A research proposal put forward to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research was rejected. However, the mindset of universities on cooperation with the industry had already changed and cooperation with industries became a vital component of a vibrant research institute, whereas at the start of his career academia and industry were considered as entities, which should be kept strictly separate. The establishment of a second group headed by Prof. Vicco von Bülow focusing on chicken anemia virus extended the research portfolio and increased the international visibility of the institute also by developing the first vaccine against chicken anemia disease.

Times changed in November 1989 when the Berlin wall came down and 2 different veterinary faculties, both with a poultry institute, had to be re-unified. This had a major impact on staff and teaching but it was handled very professionally characterized by mutual appreciation. It was important that Gerd Monreal had already established contacts with colleagues in East Berlin even before the fall of the wall. As a testimony to this activity, a very comprehensive 2-volume textbook on poultry diseases in German language was completed in 1992. Gerd Monreal together with Prof. Dr. Günther Heider from the Humboldt University acted as Editors. The tremendous work of proofreading and other editorial activities can not be judged highly enough. In addition to its contents, this book also had a political message as all scientists involved in Poultry Diseases in East and West Germany contributed with chapters in their own expertise. On a similar level, a meeting was organized in Potsdam in 1993 supposed to bring together veterinarians, scientists and poultry producers from East and West. It followed meetings held in 1988 in Vienna (“neutral ground”) and Budapest 1991, the later one already under new political realities.

In 1997, Gerd Monreal was awarded with the “Tom Newman International Award” for Poultry Husbandry Research from the British Breeders and Hatcheries Association. The handover took place in the British Parliament building in London and remained an unforgettable event. The award was the closing chapter of a long lasting scientific career.

Retirement

With his retirement Gerd Monreal cut off his activities with the poultry area in order not to be something at a place he felt the time was gone. However, he was still very much interested in all ongoing activities and regularly attended the gala dinner at the Hafez International Turkey Symposia but he never interfered nor commented on subjects he was not directly involved with any more. Instead, he thought about studying history at university, it would have suited him very well, but it didn't become a reality. His main interest was to cultivate friendships and his social network besides focusing on his family with two married daughters, grandchildren and his beloved wife Dorothea. The far too early death of his daughter Frauke was a big tragedy and Gerd Monreal appreciated even more being embedded in a family with strong relationships.



Dr. Michael Hess, Prof. Gerhard Monreal and Prof. Dr. Hafez Mohamed Hafez leaving the Dean's office at the Veterinary Faculty of the Freie Universität Berlin, 21st of March 2000.



“Institute of Poultry Diseases (1970-2004), Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
This history is based on documents supplied by Prof. Dr. Gerhard Monreal:

“Woher wir kommen, wer wir sind”, 1998

„Kurze Darstellung der Geschichte des Instituts für Geflügelkrankheiten der Freien Universität Berlin“, 1996

„50 Jahre Veterinärmedizin an der Freien Universität Berlin-Tiermedizin im Wandel“, 2001

and Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Otfried Siegmann

“Laudatio zum 70. Geburtstag von Prof. Monreal“ 1998

Additional biographical materials may be available from the AAAP Historical Archives located at Iowa State University. Contact information is as follows:

Special Collections Dept. & University Archives

403 Parks Library

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