A TRIBUTE TO JAMES ROBERT GILLETTE

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Research on drug metabolism and the associated reactions of chemical toxicity has recently lost a major scientific pioneer. It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of our friend and colleague Jim Gillette on December 26th, 2001. During his scientific career Jim contributed over 300 scientific papers on a wide range of topics related to drug metabolism and the toxicity of xenobiotics and their metabolites. His research interests and contributions were broad-based, and many serve as the foundation for our current knowledge of pharmacology and drug metabolism. These contributions stand as a fitting memorial to this insightful man when the history of research on drug metabolism is written.

Jim Gillette was a quiet man; some might even say he was shy. He was born and raised in mid-America where he attended Cornell College in Iowa (Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry) and received an Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy in Biochemistry from the State University of Iowa. His thesis was titled The Catalysis of the Oxidation of Some Dihydroxybenzene Derivatives by Various Metallic Ions. In 1954, Jim joined the laboratory of Chemical Pharmacology at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, MD) headed by Bernard Brodie. Here Jim initiated many studies to determine the nature of the enzymes associated with reactions of drug metabolism. From this initial experience, he developed a lifelong interest in cellular toxicity, in particular the toxicity associated with xenobiotic metabolites. He became Chief of the Laboratory of Chemical Pharmacology at National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in 1972 and died at age 73 years. Jim’s appearance never changed during the 40 years that I knew him (see photos taken in Australia, Arkansas, Philadelphia, Germany, and Ireland over a period of 20 years). He was an important and critical member of numerous organizing committees for symposia and workshops concerned with drug metabolism.

Jim’s first paper after he joined the Brodie laboratory was published with Bert LaDu and B. B. Brodie with the title The Oxidation of Drugs by Liver Microsomes: On the Role of TPNH and Oxygen. This seminal paper stands today at the very heart of our understanding of drug metabolism and serves as a landmark for the large number of studies subsequently carried out by Jim and many other investigators.

Jim was a religious man who was devoted to his family. His wife of 48 years, Rema Joan Reed Gillette, and their two children and four grandchildren were the shining light in Jim’s life. In recent years, Jim had turned his interest to genealogy to better understand his heritage. Even so, he kept a keen interest in the progress of research on drug metabolism and attended many recent meetings before his health started to fail.

This 30th issue of Drug Metabolism and Disposition is dedicated to the memory of Jim Gillette. I was fortunate to co-edit with Ken Leibman of the Second International Symposium on Microsomes and Drug Oxidations, held at Stanford University in 1972, and set the pattern for future publications of papers on drug metabolism.

There is so much one can say about the research contributions by Jim Gillette and his personal friendship to so many of us in our field of endeavor. Jim was a great man. He will be greatly missed.

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PHOTOS OF JIM GILLETTE OVER THE YEARS