

In Memoriam
Tommy Berman 1934-2013

By Dr Tamar Zohary – Director, Kinneret Limnological Laboratory

On behalf of his colleagues at the Kinneret Limnological Laboratory, who are feeling his loss greatly. We were shocked and stunned to hear of Tommy's disappearance in the Galapagos Islands, and devastated the following day to hear the news that his body had been found.

Only a week previously Tommy had participated in a working session of the editorial board of the Kinneret Book, and everything seemed as usual with no hint of black clouds on the horizon. In fact, the only special item was Tommy's enthusiastic announcement of his forthcoming trip to Galapagos. The news of his death seemed unreal, like something out of a bad dream; as a colleague from the U.S.A. wrote me in a single word: REALLY???

Tommy was one of the founders of the Kinneret Limnological Laboratory - the Sea of Galilee Branch of the then new Israel Institute for Oceanographic & Limnological Research. He was the first Director of the laboratory, serving from 1967 to 1971, and again from 1986 until his retirement in 1998. He was also our longest-serving colleague, one of the "Old Guard" working on research in the lab throughout the years. Many of us worked with him for decades, for us he was almost "family". In other words – we simply loved him!

As head of the lab, he set up scientific infrastructure, was responsible for recruiting excellent professionals and led the limnological research of the Kinneret to impressive international heights. Thanks to Tommy and his colleagues, our laboratory was internationally recognized as the laboratory situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, researching the ecosystem functioning of this famous lake. He maintained research ties with research organizations abroad as well as here in Israel. He kept contact with the Israel Water Authority who financed the long-term monitoring program on Lake Kinneret, a central activity of the Kinneret Limnological Laboratory. He fostered the close connection between monitoring and research, understanding that this combination forms both the basis for future research and the basis for recommendations regarding the management of the lake as a main source of drinking water for the State of Israel.

Tommy made a major contribution to research of the Sea of Galilee, as well as to science in general, in many varied topics usually associated with aquatic micro-organisms. He had a unique talent to sense where scientific research was heading, a rare talent that few are blessed with. Using this talent, he made sure to be at the forefront of upcoming research. For instance, he recently made landmark research into transparent particles and their role in water desalination plants. Other examples include: research into the microbial loop in the 80's, and organic nitrogen as a source of available N for algae, in the 90's. Tommy had other talents – among them a gift for writing, which other researchers can only dream of. He had a superb way of handling interpersonal relationships, with researchers both in Israel and abroad. His friendly personality and his willingness to share his knowledge gave him international

recognition, and his appointment to national bodies ensuring the high quality of Israel's drinking water.

Tommy was blessed with vitality, scientific curiosity and a sense of humour that never changed or aged. After his retirement, he carried on fundraising for research, successfully leading research projects and mentoring post-graduate students. He was always involved with every aspect of our laboratory, and always willing to listen and give advice.

Tommy was a role model: he showed us how to retire from full-time/professional work and enjoy a creative, enriching time with friends and family. He was recently awarded the lifetime achievement award of the Israel Association for Aquatic Sciences. This is a prize awarded to the elite of researchers in the field, to those who through their work have consistently contributed to the advancement of water sciences and left their stamp. We in the Laboratory celebrated the award by raising a glass in his honour; Tommy was very moved and we were ecstatic!

Tommy's absence has left a great void in the life of the lab, the environment which filled such a large part of his adult life for so many years. We still cannot grasp the implications of this loss for the future of the laboratory.

In conclusion – we hope everyone has the luck to reach such an advanced age in such a wonderful physical and mental state. Personally, I would be happy to meet the angel of death as Tommy did –mature and wise, at the prime of life, in the place he always dreamed of visiting, suddenly and without the agony and misery of a terminal illness or the bewilderment and helplessness of failing mental powers and degenerative senility. There are few in this world who are granted a “good” death. We will always remember Tommy at the height of his creativity.

To the family we can only say: Your sorrow is our sorrow, your grief is our grief. He will always be missed by those who loved him.