

In Memoriam
A.E. David Schonfield (1920–1995)



Psychology and gerontology lost one of its most critical thinkers and researchers as well as one of its most caring and joyful members when Professor David Schonfield died on March 10, 1995, after a valiant struggle with cancer. David Schonfield was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1920, but was brought up and schooled in England. He came from a distinguished family being the sixth child of the well-known Rabbi, Dr. Victor Schonfield and his wife, Rachel Leah Schonfield. His childhood and background laid the foundation for David's strong sense of responsibility, high moral standards and a deep caring about his fellow humans.

During World War II he worked as an administrator for the British Ministry of Information, and at the Central Commission for Germany in the Foreign Office where he achieved the equivalent rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. After the war, David began what was to be a long and illustrious academic career by reading Experimental Psychology and Moral Sciences at Cambridge University. He then went on to work at Cambridge's Nuffield Unit on Aging which led to his interest in psychology and aging. David was always interested in the application of research and theory to "real life" situations. Thus, after Cambridge he moved to London and completed a Post-graduate diploma in Abnormal Psychology at the Maudsley Hospital. Subsequently, he spent three years in practical settings, first as an educational psychologist, and then as a clinical psychologist. In 1957, he immigrated to Canada, where he started his career as professor of educational psychology in Calgary in what was then the University of Alberta (later the University of Calgary). However, in 1960 the Department of Psychology became an independent unit with Professor Schonfield as acting head and head. What started as a one man department with David teaching all (3) full year courses in Psychology grew into one of the leading psychology departments in Canada with David continuing to play a leadership role in its development. David was a dedicated teacher. His many students and those he mentored through their graduate studies to make their own mark in the field attest to the devotion that existed between David and his students. David was among the very first in about 1967 to give an undergraduate course on the "Psychology of Aging." He made significant contributions in psychology and aging locally, nationally and internationally. He was a member of the executive of the Alberta Council on Aging, Vice-President of the Calgary Safety Council, and a Senior Research Fellow for the National Research Council. He was on the editorial boards of several journals, a widely sought assessor of grants and an advisor and consultant in psychology and aging. This is a testimony to his critical thinking, incisive questioning, high standards and original contributions.

David was a founding member of the Canadian Association on Gerontology and served as its first Vice-President from 1975 to 1979. He was largely responsible for getting financial support for the struggling, fledgling organization and made a tremendous contribution both to the Association and to gerontology. This was recognized by the Canadian Association on

Gerontology Distinguished Services Award. He earned many other honours including fellowships in the Canadian Psychological Association and Gerontological Society of America and the Queen's Jubilee Medal. David was the associate Editor (Psychology) of the *Canadian Journal on Aging* on its founding (1982–1986).

David Schonfield was basically a man with a sense of humility and a great sense of humour with a well-honed sense of the ridiculous. His frequently voiced credo was the need to ask the right questions before you could think about getting the right answers. This often led David to work behind-the-scenes and some, therefore, may not realize how important he was in promoting gerontology in Canada. An early conference organized by the Canada Council was directed to aging and on David's advice and persuasion out of this conference came a significant report. When the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, a few years later initiated its strategic grants program, it turned to this report on aging which then led to the decision to initiate the Population Aging Strategic Grants program, the first of its kind. It was this strategic grants program which established centres of aging in Canada and really put education and research in aging on the map. David's advice also contributed to the then Minister of Health's decision to establish a National Advisory Council on Aging. David Schonfield could very rightly be called the father of gerontology in Canada.

In writing of David's many professional achievements one must not underestimate his academic and scholarly achievements and these are reflected in his many publications. He was noted for his pioneer work in learning and remembering. He was quoted frequently for his "lab-to-life" writing and for his tendency to coin phrases. For many who knew David, "geronting" will always bring a smile and fond memories. In a report to the University of Calgary in 1990, David himself best summarizes the core of his being, "the first half (of life) prepared me reasonably for what followed, even prepared me for retirement. Enjoyment of learning, stringent ethical principles, especially a first priority of practical action to help others, but without burdens of guilt, came from my Victorian-type English and Jewish background. A burning drive for clarity of thinking, mine and others', a predilection for pragmatic, and common sense approaches to every issue, rather than theory and metaphysics came both from home and Cambridge ...". In the same report he states "Like all elderly people, there are some aspects of the contemporary climate that worry me greatly, e.g., the importance given to image over substance. On the other hand, I appreciate more than I used to a sincere compliment."

I hope David would feel we offer this memoriam as such a sincere compliment from all of us in gerontology who owe him so much.

We will always remember David and his contributions both serious and joyous. We miss him as a friend, husband, father, and grandfather, and as an illustrious colleague. We celebrate his life and many achievements.

David's first wife, Elizabeth, predeceased him. He is survived by his second wife, Donna Quinton, and his son, Benjamin (Denise) and grandson, Brett.

Blossom T. Wigdor