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My Short History of Nearly Everything about Brian Moore: Boss, Mentor, VIP, and Friend

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Karolina Kluk, PhD

Lost in the Cosmos: The Boss

"Welcome. And congratulations. I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn't easy, I know. I suspect it was a little tougher than you realized."[1] … these may have been the exact words spoken by Brian when I first arrived in his Lab.

It was September 2000, I was over the moon after receiving the exciting news of being accepted on the Erasmus students exchange program. Alicja Malicka and I were going to spend a few months in THE LAB! The letter from the university was immediately followed by a rather pragmatic email from Brian that brought me straight back to earth. Brian outlined an exhaustive list of problems we might encounter in the UK and emphasized how well we need to be prepared to survive. Who is this man? We readily took up the challenge and after a 24-hour bus journey from Poland, we arrived in Cambridge, England for the first time. We made it through the maze of paths and corridors to finally reach THE LAB and meet the big Brian, whose book had just been translated into Polish. Brian was a busy man and we were slightly scared of him. We found him in his office working on a paper. Before turning our way to greet us, he finished a paragraph and said: “Oh, hello” and smiled. As it turned out, the Boss was neither intimidating nor scary, instead he turned out to be a gentle giant. THE LAB was an amazing, intellectually stimulating place, filled with great people who became like a family to me and to many others who had the privilege to work there (Figure 1).

Figure 1. From right to left giant Brian, me, Brian Glasberg (BG), Alicja Malicka, and Tom Baer. Strategically out of sight is the mountain of coffee mugs. The Lab smelled of coffee and was fuelled by caffeine. Coffee cups were everywhere.

A New Age Dawns: The Mentor

2000 was the year Brian coined the term “dead regions in the cochlea”, i.e. complete loss of inner hair cells over a certain region of the basilar membrane.[2] Little did I realize that missing inner hair cells would take over my life. Brian's ceaseless encouragement got me through hours and hours of psychophysical experiments. His supervisory strategy of quietly asking whether I had any new "beautiful data" to share with him worked well and resulted in many publications that were only a tiny contribution to his cosmic 600 papers published so far (June 2020). He can write a paper in a day and provide constructive feedback on yours in an hour. What is his secret? Brian is efficient, extremely efficient. One Monday, when reviewing a paper on softness imperception in hearing-impaired subjects he expressed doubts about this concept. Within a week he designed an experiment, recruited and tested hearing-impaired subjects, and submitted the paper on Friday before heading to the pub.[3]

In addition to being the most efficient scientist I know, I also find him exceptionally

generous with time for his students. I could walk into his office any time of the day (well … anytime between 9 am and 6 pm exactly, except for the sacrosanct hour when he would lead the lab through secret college passages for lunch!), and he would put everything he was working on aside and discuss any data I had.

My first ARO conference was in 2004, I did not know anybody and spent a whole day presenting my poster on psychophysical tuning curves.[4] Brian introduced me to everyone he knew and by the end of the meeting, I felt like I belonged.

You could often see him at conferences looking a bit like a VIP, surrounded by his current, past, and future students. He would skilfully interview you for a PhD position or your next postdoc without you even realizing you were being interviewed, by having a casual conversation with you during the poster session, on the way to get some lunch or at NASA (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Brian and the Saturn IB SA-209 rocket at the NASA Kennedy Space Centre in 2004 following the ARO.

Life Itself: The VIP

Brian is the last to feel entitled but was nevertheless quite happy to enjoy a bit of a VIP status. When he was visiting Poland almost 20 years ago, Alicja and I were given the task of showing Brian our home city of Poznan. On the way to the city centre Brian noticed a big advert of “Impressionists from Monet to Gaugin” exhibition held at the National Museum and enthusiastically said that he would really like to see it. The

exhibition was the biggest art event in the city for years. It was sold out and the queue to get in went around the block. We did not have tickets nor time to queue. We approached the guard and explained in Polish that Brian was a top VIP from Cambridge with an interest in Impressionists. The guard took it very seriously, acknowledged that a VIP cannot possibly queue for a whole day, but insisted he could not let us in through the main door. Instead, to the shock and surprise of Brian, he led us through the backdoor and a maze of underground tunnels. We entered the exhibition via the central lift having bypassed all security checks – the VIP way! It is great to be a friend of a VIP!

After having enjoyed the exhibition we had plenty of time left, so we travelled to the local park to take our VIP on a tour of the lake on a human-powered quad bike, with Brian sitting in the back-seat shouting “Faster! Faster!” It is great to be a friend of a VIP!

Life Goes on: The Friend

Brian respects the opinions of others but is determined to get things his way for the greater good. Once at a dinner party in his house, he gave his guests a choice of cheesecake or cheese and crackers after the main course. We voted cheesecake. Brian acknowledged the result and asked with disbelief: “Would you like to eat cheese and crackers after the cheesecake then? Let’s vote again.” Needless to say, we had cheese and crackers first.

Brian, despite being one of the greats in the field of hearing science, is the opposite of intimidating and scary, a gentle giant, who over the years taught me nearly everything about research, life, and how not to feel lost in the Cosmos. His caring nature extended beyond his students. Years later, he did not think twice to offer his beard as an entertainment centre to my crying one-year-old, which worked wonders.

Figure 3. Thank you, Brian!

Throughout the years Brian has provided me with his kind mentorship, guidance, and support that shaped not only my academic career but the person I am now and the way I see life. He is one special person (Fig. 3).

SAVE THE DATE:

To celebrate Brian Moore's 75th Birthday we will hold a special **Hearing Symposium** in Cambridge, UK on **25th - 26th March 2021**.

References

1. Bryson B. A Short History of Nearly Everything. Great Britain: Doubleday; 2003.
2. Moore BC, Huss M, Vickers DA et al. A test for the diagnosis of dead regions in the cochlea. Br J Audiol 2000;34:205–224.
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4. Kluk K and Moore BC. Factors affecting psychophysical tuning curves for normally hearing subjects. Hear Res 2004;194:118–34.