Marc Alan Cohn

Marc Alan Cohn, emeritus professor in the Plant Pathology and Crop Science Department at Louisiana State University (LSU) and ASPB Legacy Society founding member, passed away June 19, 2021, from complications associated with pancreatic cancer. Marc “retired” from his position at LSU in 2017 but remained actively engaged there as an emeritus–adjunct professor. He continued to teach his favorite class, Professional Development, and he worked on scientific publications and mentored students. He remained active in many scientific societies, in particular ASPB’s Southern Section in his role of financial oversight and accountability officer. In addition, Marc, aka Dr. Jazz, developed and presented a jazz radio podcast, “Gifts and Messages,” on WHYR in Baton Rouge until October 10, 2020, when the final podcast, “Last Dance,” aired.

Marc’s development as a scientist began while he was an undergraduate at Northeastern University. Marc, “the man with 1,000 questions” (we might also add, “the man of millions of words”), was called into the office of one of his professors, A. K. Khudairi, who turned the tables and asked Marc what causes a tomato to ripen. That simple question led Marc to work with Khudairi on fruit ripening, and subsequent conversations about career goals led Marc to an assistantship at Cornell and graduate studies, as opposed to his initial plan of becoming a surgeon. Medicine’s loss was seed biology’s gain.

As a scientist and thinker, Marc was exceptional. His contributions to our understanding of seed dormancy are many and impactful, and all stemmed from his enthusiasm and passion for the topic. He always had something new and exciting to report, which drew his colleagues and those of us on the periphery of the field to his talks. His insights, often delivered with wit and piercing honesty, fueled the research of many, and his scientific integrity created a solid foundation for all to build upon.

Marc’s many contributions were recognized by the 2007 Crop Science Society of America Seed Science Award, which, although very prestigious, seems inadequate now in light of his extensive contributions to the field over his long career. A longtime friend and colleague of Marc’s wrote in a letter for Marc’s retirement in 2017, “Your knowledge of the history and literature in the field, your understanding of how research questions in seed biology have evolved, and your high standards and honesty about what constitutes good science have made you a respected colleague whose advice and opinions are valued greatly.”

Marc did not save all his enthusiasm for seed biology and dormancy; he was also passionate about advancing the profession in the broadest terms through his teaching, mentoring, and public outreach and in his service to ASPB at the national and regional levels. As a teacher and mentor, Marc was fiercely committed to training students, who found working with Marc both a challenging and an exciting experience. His encyclopedic knowledge of and passion for seed biology were infectious. He was always asking questions, because he was continually interested in what students and colleagues were doing. He would say, “There are no answers, only better questions to ask.” Marc inspired and challenged students; he received many teaching awards at LSU, including the 2015 Tiger Athletic Foundation President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Marc was a dedicated officer of ASPB and a central figure in the Southern Section. The Southern Section was formed in the late 1930s, but it was Marc and his colleagues, through their enthusiasm and financial prudence, who continued on next page
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made it truly successful and a powerful voice in ASPB. Marc was clearly the financial mastermind and a driving force of the section. When no longer an officer, Marc continued training all incoming secretary-treasurers of the section in careful budget management to keep the Southern Section on strong financial footing. Because of Marc’s efforts, the section has been able to help defray costs of student registration fees for the Southern Section meetings and to fund speakers for the annual symposium. At meetings, Marc was always an active participant who asked questions and mentored graduate students and colleagues. In recognition of his tremendous contributions to the Southern Section, Marc was presented the Southern Section Distinguished Service Award in 2000.

Marc’s passing leaves a giant hole in the heart of the Southern Section that will never be filled. For those of us who knew Marc (or Dr. Jazz), our world is a better place because of him. He will no longer go from session to session at meetings in his suit jacket with his pipe in his pocket, inspired to ask just one more question. But he was not only a wonderful colleague, mentor, and passionate scientist of the highest integrity, he was our friend. He was one of the good ones. He will be sorely missed.

Caryl Chlan
Kent Chapman
Becca Dickstein
Steven Footitt
Mel Oliver