

Preface



It was Bill Whelan, the first editor-in-chief of *Trends in Biochemical Sciences*, who decided to include historical articles in the journal. Inspired by the "100 Years Ago" column in *Scientific American*, Bill named the TiBS column "50 Years Ago," and began to solicit articles from prominent scientists and historians of science. Judging by the luminaries who accepted the invitation, he had struck a rich vein. The articles were both autobiographical and biographical, and ranged from brief anecdotes to serious contributions to the history of biochemistry. Of necessity, given the title of the column, the topics were drawn from what might now be regarded as the classical period of biochemistry, when much had still to be learned about the molecular constituents of the cell and how they functioned in synthetic and metabolic pathways. The column became an established part of TiBS, and the articles became longer and more scholarly.

In 1985, Judith Hall, then editor of TiBS, asked if I would like to take on "50 Years Ago." I had published several historical papers in TiBS and I leapt at the chance to promote historical studies of biochemistry. Judith and I decided to rename the column; selecting topics simply because they were 50 years old seemed rather arbitrary and, more important, I wanted to encourage papers on historical topics much closer to the present time. Judith suggested "Reflections on Biochemistry" as we wanted the authors not just to tell us what research they had done, but also to ruminate on its consequences. A further modification led to the current title: "Historical Reflections."

More recently, a conversation in the bar of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory between me, Emma Wilson, editor of TiBS from 1999 to 2002, and John Inglis, Executive Director of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, produced the idea of assembling in book form the most interesting of the articles that were spread, largely unappreciated, across many years of red-bound volumes of TiBS. But we were amazed to find that there were over 260 articles! How should the selection be done? Should we try to cover the whole compass of biochemistry? Should we concentrate on autobiographical arti-

cles? Should we include only articles written by scientists—or even just Nobel laureates? When I came to look more closely, it was clear that the area the articles covered most comprehensively, where the most interesting selection could be made, was the Central Dogma, that is DNA, RNA, and protein synthesis. And the number of relevant articles was just right for the size of book we had in mind.

Fortuitously, the publication of this collection coincides with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB). *TiBS* came into being through the hard work of Bill Whelan and Bill Slater of the then-IUB, and Jack Franklin and Sandy Grimwade at Elsevier in Amsterdam. There were discussions in 1973, a contract was drawn up in 1974, and the first edition appeared in January 1976, with Whelan as editor-in-chief and Joan Morgan as editor. The partnership between the IUBMB and Elsevier continues to the present day, as the joint logos on the *TiBS* cover testify.

The history articles reprinted here are the work of many people. I thank the editors and editors-in-chief of *TiBS*, all of whom have believed that the history of our field is not only interesting and important, but also entertaining. At Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, John Inglis initiated the project, and Maryliz Dickerson and Jan Argentine kept it on track. But it is the contributors to this book who most deserve our thanks, for reminding us of the human stories that often lie behind the polished sheen of the papers we read in the journals.