In Memoriam: Eloise Giblett 1921–2009

D. Mallory

Eloise “Elo” Giblett was born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1921 and, in 1931, the family moved to Spokane. Elo developed a keen interest in music at an early age, taking piano, dance, and violin, the instrument on which she would focus, becoming concertmaster of her high school orchestra. She put aside music, turned to science, and received a BS in bacteriology from the University of Washington (U of W) in 1942. World War II had started, so Elo joined the WAVES in 1944, became a medical laboratory technician, and served until 1946. She returned to the U of W and received her MS degree in microbiology in 1947 and then, in 1951, graduated first in her class in the second class to graduate from the new medical school at the U of W.

During the medical internship and hematology fellowship at U of W, her interest in human genetics was encouraged. In 1955, she became the first full-time physician at King County Blood Bank (now the Puget Sound Blood Center) as the Associate Director of the Typing and Crossmatch Laboratory and was given a 6-month sabbatical with Dr. Patrick Mollison at the Blood Transfusion Research Unit in London, England. There, she studied the Lewis blood group system, measured the rate of tagged RBC destruction, became acquainted with the clinical potential of the Coombs antiglobulin test, and mastered the tests used at that time in Dr. Mollison’s laboratory. When she returned to Seattle, she began to use the antiglobulin test to find RBC antibodies and discovered anti-V and anti-Js.

Her numerous studies of the polymorphisms of haptoglobin and transferrins and her interest in RBC, plasma, and protein polymorphisms resulted in the renowned 1969 publication of her book, Genetic Markers in Human Blood. In addition, she discovered that two forms of inherited immunodeficiency disease were caused by deficiencies of the enzymes adenosine deaminase and purine nucleoside phosphorylase.

In 1979, Dr. Giblett became the Director of the Puget Sound Blood Center and remained so until she retired in 1987. Upon her retirement, she became Director Emeritus of the Blood Center and Professor Emeritus of the U of W Medical School. After 40 years, she returned to the violin and even helped found a new music school.

Dr. Giblett was president of the American Society of Human Genetics (1973); a member of the Advisory Board of the American Society of Hematology (1980–1986); a member of the Editorial Board of Blood, Transfusion, and The American Journal of Human Genetics (among a few); and chairperson of the Enzyme Nomenclature Committee of the International Workshop on Human Gene Mapping.

She received many honors during her lengthy career, including two from the American Association of Blood Banks:

- 1975—Emily Cooley Lecture Award (American Association of Blood Banks)
- 1976—Karl Landsteiner Memorial Award (American Association of Blood Banks)
- 1978—The Philip S. Levine Award (American Society of Clinical Pathology)
- 1980—Election, National Academy of Science
- 1987—Distinguished Alumna Award (University of Washington)

Dr. Giblett has left a legacy of original scientific discoveries, a book that was groundbreaking for the field of immunohematology, and colleagues who were scientifically mentored and generously helped by her excellent editorial skills. Those who knew her will remember a very interesting and giving human being.

Delores Mallory, MT(ASCP)SBB
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