



Dr. Arnold A. Gerall, 1927-2013

Photo by D.A. Dewsbury,
University of Florida (Emeritus).

Arnold A. Gerall, a true Mensch[†], died peacefully on December 11 at the age of 86.

Born and raised in New Haven, CT, Gerall spent a year or two in the navy toward the end of World War II, then sped through higher education. In successive years he earned his BS (Univ. of Michigan, 1949), MA (Univ. of Connecticut, 1950), and PhD (Univ. of Iowa, 1951). After five years each at the University of Rochester and University of Kansas Medical School, Gerall joined the Department of Psychology at Tulane University in 1961, where he stayed after retiring in 1997. Gerall and his wife, Helene, lived in and loved the city of New Orleans, and they had planned to spend the rest of their lives there. Those plans and much of their house were wrecked by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the Geralls moved to North Carolina, where they had family living nearby.

Many of us first learned Gerall's name as a coauthor of Phoenix, Goy, Gerall, and Young (1959), widely viewed as the seminal paper about the sexual differentiation of behavior. W.C. Young was the director of the laboratory; the others were graduate students or postdoctoral fellows. Out of respect for all the authors and the landmark status of the paper, it was usually referred to in seminars and conversation by the names of all the authors. Few referred to it as "Phoenix et al." except in publications whose style demanded it. However, it was Gerall who inferred the paper's major conclusion and persuaded the group to include it: Hormones acting directly on the brain during gestation play the major role in the sexual differentiation of behavior. This "centralist" view was at odds with the then-prevailing view that hormones act only to differentiate the genitalia and related organs, and that consequent feedback to the brain from these organs was responsible for behavioral sex differences. Gerall bore the brunt of a sardonic attack on the centralist view (Beach, 1971), but within a few years his interpretation was vindicated.

Gerall's influential research included the first demonstration that the ovaries of rats are active prenatally, demonstration of the pivotal role of experience in the development of male sexual behavior, and exploration of the neuroanatomy of the GnRH system. His lab also published important papers on photoperiod, estrous cycles, and circadian rhythms.

After he retired, he continued to learn new techniques (e.g., immunohistochemistry) in order to apply them to new questions (e.g., the functions of hypothalamic releasing hormones).



Seated, from left: Ronald Rabedeau, William Young, Helene Gerall. *Standing:* Richard Whalen, Charles Phoenix, Frank Beach, Knut Larsson, Arnold Gerall, Robert Goy. Berkeley, California, 1958. Photo by John Shutze, University of California, Berkeley; provided by S.M. Breedlove, Michigan State University.

Thirty-eight students earned PhDs with Gerall, and through those students he had scores of "grandstudents." Gerall notably influenced many junior colleagues who spent no time with him as student or postdoc but nonetheless thought of him as a mentor. He would hear our papers or visit our posters at meetings, and if he thought our science was not up to snuff, he would tell us where it was weak and, often, how to strengthen it. But unlike some of his contemporaries, he never seemed to feel the need to take his juniors down a peg. When one visited New Orleans for a conference, Gerall was as generous with his hospitality as he was with his advice, as he

and Helene hosted a couple of memorable prawn feasts at their home or in local restaurants.

Many of us got our first grants (or had our applications turned down) through an NIH Study Section on which Gerall served two terms. He was also one of the originators of SBN's forebear, the Eastern Conference on Reproductive Behavior. In 2008, Gerall received SBN's highest honor, the Daniel S. Lehrman Lifetime Achievement Award. He was also elected a Fellow of the American Psychological Association (APA), President of APA's Division of Behavioral Neuroscience & Comparative Psychology, and President of the

International Society of Developmental Psychobiology. Tulane recognized his excellence as a teacher by honoring him with the Shelton H. Hackney Award. Memorial donations may be sent to The Arnold Gerall Prize in Neuroscience, Department of Psychology, Tulane University, 2007 Percival Stern Hall, New Orleans, LA 70118.

Gerall is survived by Helene, by six nieces and nephews, by nine grandnieces and grandnephews and their children, and by us, his grateful colleagues. Thank you, Arnie.

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†Someone to admire and emulate, someone of noble character. The key to being “a real mensch” is nothing less than character, rectitude, dignity, a sense of what is right, responsible, decorous. (Rosten, L. 1968, *The Joys of Yiddish*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 237).

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References

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