

Eugène Yourassowsky Foundation

Professor Eugène Yourassowsky was born in Brussels on 1 August 1929 and died there on 12 March 1994. His research works in microbiology, and in particular on the mechanisms of action of antibiotics, has made him a world-renowned specialist.

After completing his secondary education at the Athénée de St-Gilles, he enrolled at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), where he obtained his certificate in medicine, surgery and childbirth in July 1955. Rather than do his military service, he opted for civilian service. With his young wife, he was sent to Rwanda to work in a dispensary (as the only doctor). Quite apart from the unfailing love of sub-Saharan Africa that his stay there engendered, these 3 years in Africa were to have a major impact on his career: it was in Rwanda that he discovered the



world of pathogens and the diseases they cause. Moreover, he was confronted with a lack of resources in the face of the immensity of the task and the diversity of the care to be provided. But his talent and imagination for developing "D system" solutions often enabled him to solve problems. One of his researchers recalls the valuable advice he once gave her: "If you don't have the means to do what you want to do, invent the system that will enable you to do it".

On his return to Belgium, he joined Professor Lambert's Internal Medicine Department at the Brugmann Hospital. His interest in infectious diseases led him to develop the hospital's microbiology laboratory. But thanks to his internist formation, he always placed the patient at the centre of his concerns and attached paramount importance to the dialogue between the laboratory and clinicians in order to establish a correct diagnosis. He was also convinced that a good result was the fruit of teamwork, and that every member of the team deserved esteem and respect, whatever their rank. Working in his laboratory was therefore considered as a privilege, and explained why he was surrounded by a team of enthusiastic and dedicated

collaborators with whom he was able to create a research unit focusing mainly on the mode of action of antibiotics both in vitro and in vivo. The quality of his work and publications earned him first a national and then an international reputation, justifying the financial support he received and the research contracts he signed with pharmaceutical companies.

Like any doctor working in a university environment, Eugène Yourassowsky also had, alongside his clinical and research duties, a teaching function which he carried brilliantly. As Professor of Microbiology in the ULB Faculty of Medicine, he enthralled generations of students, to whom he passed on his passion for microbiology and infectious pathology. His lectures were lively, full of images and anecdotes.

A biography of Professor Yourassowsky limited solely to aspects of his medical career would be incomplete. What also set this great man apart were his human qualities: "Mr Youra", as he was known to most people, was a warm, caring and empathetic listener, always available to help those who came to him for advice or comfort. His intellectual and moral honesty gave him an authority that was rarely challenged. In addition, his vast general knowledge, his taste for art and his personal artistic gifts made him a fascinating interlocutor whom his Belgian and foreign colleagues always met with pleasure.

Eugène Yourassowsky was a workaholic. But he always found time to look after his family, who held a special place in his heart; His children are grateful to him for having aroused their scientific and artistic curiosity from an early age, and for encouraging the gifts he saw in them.

This is why, when he died in March 1994 at the age of 64, his family and close collaborators wanted to perpetuate his memory by creating a Foundation whose aims would reflect the objectives he had always sought to achieve. Through a prize awarded every two years, the Foundation's aim was to reward research work in clinical microbiology or infectious pathology, carried out in Belgium, in an academic institution, by a candidate aged under 45 and holding a Belgian university degree. Twelve winners to date have been honoured with this prize, belonging to various Belgian academic institutions.

The members of the Foundation are particularly grateful to the FNRS and the FWO - to whom the funds have been transferred - for accepting this mission and for respecting the aims that the Foundation has pursued to date.

