

Marc Hautekeete

Nadine Bourgeois



Marc was born the 21st of April in 1958, in Antwerp. Both his parents were working, so he had no brother or sister, but already a lot of friends, because he was very sociable. He went to school in his town, for the primary school and the atheneum, where he chose the section latin-mathematics.

As a boy, he spent many week-ends with the scouts ; later, himself became "Akela" and took care of younger children.

He was sportive and devoted a part of his free time to ride horseback and to sail. One of his dreams, when he was 10, was to become captain of a boat, the one he imagined with his Lego blocks in the secret of his bedroom.

Reading was like a drug for him, in Dutch and also in French, later even in English; it gave him the desire to write. He also liked to watch movies with his father.

When he was 16 he discovered the Mountain. What Henrik Ibsen wrote about this kingdom of altitude "just go on and on... Do you see the mountain ranges there, far away? One behind another. They rise up. They tower. That is my deep, unending, inexhaustible king-

dom", became the words of his own bible. Like a pelgrim, he climbed : in France, in Norway, in India, ...

But he had also to go to school... He decided to become a physician and entered the University of Antwerp in 1976.

Why did he want to study medicine ? He never told me precisely. One of the reasons was certainly that he wanted to help suffering people, but another was that he thought this job would give him enough free time to continue the conquest of his lovely mountains...

In 1981 already, when he was still a student, he spent 2 months in the Northwestern University of Chicago, in the department of Gastroenterology.

He began his specialty of Internal Medicine in 1983, in the Middelheim General Hospital, in the University Hospital (UIA) and in the Stuivenberg General Hospital. In 1984, he was probably thinking he had not enough to do, as he followed for a whole year a postgraduate course in informatics at the UIA.

Once he was a physician, he hesitated between hematology and hepatology. Even with only one letter difference, the choice was hard for him. As Professor Haber suggested, he went to Paris, in November 88, in Beaujon hospital. He worked there for 1 year as foreign resident, in the department of Hepatology, whose head was professor Benhamou. With the French team, he published his first papers on liver diseases. He also made friends in Beaujon and other Parisian hospitals. He realized he had made the good choice : his professional future would be devoted to Hepatology.

When he came back from the hands of Professor Benhamou, he began to work as resident in the department of Gastroenterology in the Free University of Brussels (AZ-VUB) ; he became chief in Hepatology in 93. He was also consultant in the department of Internal Medicine at the Middelheim General Hospital, where some of his best friends were working.

I met him for the first time in Palma of Mallorca, during an EASL meeting, in September 90. I already heard from him ; I knew he had a brilliant bald skull and a horse laugh I could not miss. So I recognized him at once ! He just came back from a trekking in the Himalaya. He related well and with pleasure. He told me about his last travel before we spoke of our work. His first words were to explain me why the mountains were a part of his universe. There, he tried to fulfill some of his desires : to explore what is unknown or not well known, to enter a world he had to fight just to live, to warm himself on the fraternity of the others climbing with him, and finally to discover

the beauty of a nature unsubdued to man, far from the mediocrity of the everyday life, he said. I was surprised : I knew he was doing a good and hard work at the VUB. Later, he revealed one of his projects : to create a Belgian Association for the Study of the Liver, like the AFEF (Association Française pour l'Etude du Foie) he learned to know when he worked in Paris. And, as early as in 91, around him, we organized, sometimes at his home, sometimes at the one of us, the first meetings of what he called "la BASL souterraine".

And time continued to flow...

In 1992, ruled by Albert Geerts, he obtained a master in Medical and Pharmaceutical Research, with his work entitled "A study of the human fat-storing cell in normal and pathologic conditions using toluidine blue staining and transmission electron microscopy".

He took care of a lot of patients, published in international journals (15 cases of hepatotoxicity to amoxicillin-clavulanate acid, 3 cases of severe hepatotoxicity to benzarone, hepatitis related to phenprocoumon, 2 cases of quinolone hepatitis, all four in 95, established the relation between clavulanate acid toxicity and HLA status, presented in 96...), worked for his Ph. D. thesis, ran on mountains, assisted to congresses celebrating the Liver abroad (I remember him in Chicago, eating only in Japanese or Chinese restaurants... was it the attraction of "yellow" people for an hepatologist ?) and elaborated the structure and status of what would become the BASL. He was speaking French as well as Dutch, was the best link between our two communities and became the first president of the steering committee of the BASL, chosen in

September 95, 2 months before his twindaughters were born.

Indeed, despite all what he had to do, he found time to marry Ann, he met in an elevator of the AZ-VUB, where she specialized in Dermatology.

1996 was like a consecration: he became doctor in Medical Sciences with his thesis : "The hepatic stellate cell in human and experimental pathology : a light microscopic, electron microscopic and immunohistochemical study", again with Albert Geerts as promotor. The auditorium where he presented it was full. I remember the smile of Ann and the proud faces of his parents. He organized the first Autumn Meeting of the just born BASL at the VUB ; Professor Benhamou ensured the success of it by his moderation.

He began a book for the patients : "Hepatitis C : een verborgen epidemie" finished it in one year. It is now published.

In 1997 something broke. Was it because he had to choose between becoming head of the service of Gastroenterology of the AZ-VUB and the position of chief of the Hepatology department in the University Hospital in Gent ? He seemed to be teared. He opted for Gent and went on working. But not like before : he forgot to laugh. We all felt well that something was going wrong, but we were unable to find what to say or what to do to bring him back to us. Even his mother could not, his father was to sick to try, even his "twee prinsesjes", even his wife failed...

Our world was not heroic enough, he decided to leave it and only then found again serenity. I hope he is laughing somewhere.