

ESSAY

A Personal Tribute to Bob Jahn

WILLIAM BENGSTON

President of the Society for Scientific Exploration

Bob Jahn was the only person I ever met who spoke in complete, edited sentences. No, it was more than that; I think there were embedded paragraph structures when he spoke. A transcription of any of his talks would have the unsuspecting reader think that multiple iterations of his thoughts on paper had finally yielded the most parsimonious edited version of an intellectual tour de force. And after the pleasure of hearing him speak, it was not possible to read any of his voluminous written output without hearing the cadence and tone of his voice. Bob was not an ordinary guy.

His biography is well-known to us, from his lofty academic perch to his founding of the PEAR lab, to his central role in the founding of the SSE and becoming its longest-serving officer; to, to, to . . . There is little I could contribute that hasn't been adequately covered elsewhere. Instead, I want to make this a more personal expression of gratitude.

I first met Bob in person the same way many of you likely did; at an SSE conference. My first SSE was at the Albuquerque conference in 1999, where I gave my debut public talk on some anomalous healing data. As a newbie to the SSE, I was a bit starstruck by some of the luminaries I had only previously read from afar. Of course I had read *Margins of Reality*, but actually sitting behind Bob Jahn and Brenda Dunne in the flesh made me a bit wide-eyed. And that's not to mention seeing and hearing Peter Sturrock, the SSE president and founder, Larry Dossey, Hal Puthoff, Jacques Benveniste, John Mack, and so many others. The place was like a who's who among anomalies researchers. How would these folks take to my presentation?

Sometime the day after I spoke, Bob quietly came up to me to express interest in my data, and offered a few suggestions and words of encouragement to continue the work. He said he would think about how he could help me.

I was invited to give a longer presentation at the 2001 conference in La Jolla, California. And it was there that Bob first came to me with some

concrete ideas for funding sources that might be available to me from his personal network. He offered to spend some time contacting these sources to ensure that my needs were taken care of.

That, in essence, became a recurring pattern in our relationship for the next 17 years. It was always his question of “what can I do for you?” which he insisted be front and center whenever we talked or met. He simply would never try to discuss his latest projects unless I insisted. And insist I did, as I found his work to be so fundamentally important on so many levels. I believe without qualification that the work begun in the PEAR lab will stand the test of time and be fundamentally influential to our understanding of how the world works.

Yet here was this luminary always thinking about what he could do to help. And help he did indeed. Bob became a sounding board to me as my work progressed, and he networked me whenever possible. And he apparently also had some designs for me. At the 2007 SSE conference at the University of Virginia, Bob and Peter Sturrock buttonholed me in the astronomy building to ask me to run for the presidency of the SSE. I objected, suggesting that there was no way I was going to follow the two of them, and that Bob, then VP, would be the logical choice for the presidency. But they would have none of my protestations. Bob guaranteed me that he would mentor me through the SSE and would remain its VP. And, once again, mentor me he did. With his vast network, knowledge, and experience he could do much, and we formed a strong partnership and a deep friendship. I especially loved the friendship.

When Bob stepped down as the Vice-President of the SSE, over my objections, he did so because the consequences of time prevented him from working to his standards. But our friendship never waned, nor did his mentorship. I saw him for the last time a few months ago when I gave a talk in Princeton for ICRL (International Consciousness Research Laboratories). Despite failing health, Bob came to my talk in a wheelchair, eyes sparkling and intellect engaged. He of course wanted to know how my research was progressing and what he could do to help. Afterward we went to dinner with Brenda, and that would turn out to be our last time together.

I consider it to be one of my greatest joys to have worked with and befriended such an incredible man. His influence will live on in all those he so deeply touched.