

**From the Director:**

I mentioned in the last Newsletter that Therese Garrick, Donna Sheedy and I were attending several scientific meetings in June. We have just returned and I would like to share some of our experiences with you. Our first stop was China – we visited three different Universities in Beijing, Wuhan and **Jingzhou city (Yangtse University)** and gave lectures at each. They were very keen to hear about our efforts in NSW in developing the brain bank and the 'Using our Brains' program. There is nothing like it yet in China in spite of their massive population – this is mainly because of differences in religious and cultural attitudes and there is insufficient funding at the moment. However, they acknowledged the benefits of such programs and have recently asked the government in Beijing to assist. We travelled with one of my students – a Neurologist from Wuhan – her name is Dr. Xiaohua (shown here to my left). You can see the level of hospitality – I have never been welcomed with such a large and prominent banner – I hope that the lecture met with their expectations. The others in the photograph are the **Chief of Division of International Cooperation and Exchanges for Yangtse University, Dr. Yihu Xiao** and his assistant **Tianfang Xie**.



The things that impressed us most about China were the friendliness of the people and the positive attitudes and enthusiasm of all of the University staff that we met. Many of the senior university personnel, such as the Deans of the medical schools, were all very young and full of energy and ideas.

The first conference that we attended was on an island adjacent to Venice in Italy – San Servolo. The meeting had been organised by members of BrainNet Europe which is a "Network of Excellence" funded by the European Commission and consists of 19 brain banks across Europe. We met one of our Melbourne colleagues at the meeting – Fairlie Hinton - who is the co-ordinator for the National Network of brain banks in Australia. The main objectives of BrainNet Europe are similar to ours – the collection and distribution of high-quality post mortem tissues for research in neuroscience and to disseminate information coming from the research to the general public. If you would like more information visit <http://www.brainnet-europe.org>.

Lectures covered general brain banking issues and new techniques that can be used in medical research. It was interesting to note the particular focus of each bank. The New York bank has many Alzheimer's disease cases whereas the Imperial College in London collects multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease cases. There is a Bank for Developmental Disorders at the University of Baltimore and at the University of Edinburgh a bank for AIDS cases. If you are interested the conference lectures can be viewed on [www.brainnet-europe.org/conference/presentations](http://www.brainnet-europe.org/conference/presentations).

The conference provided us with the opportunity to meet and exchange information with colleagues and we all came away feeling that we are performing as well as or better than most other brain banks in the world.

Donna and Fairlie visited a brain bank in Paris and then we headed for Baltimore in the US to attend a meeting on alcohol brain damage – the annual meeting of the Research Society of Alcoholism (RSA). There were 1400 delegates – a sign of the extraordinary scientific interest in alcohol-related problems in the world. I presented a lecture on structural changes in the brain caused by alcohol in a special two-day course run by the RSA. All of the other speakers were from the US so it was a privilege to be invited to participate in this teaching/training program. All of the lectures will be on the web for general access later this year (<http://www.rsoa.org/>). A lot of time was spent at the RSA meeting discussing preparations for the

International Congress that we are hosting here in Sydney in September – also on alcohol research (<http://www.isbra2006.com>).

It was a very busy four-week program and we were all glad to be back home in this beautiful country.  
Clive Harper

**Vale: Alberta Victoria Daniel (1901-2006)**

It is with great sadness that we remember Alberta Daniel, who passed away recently in the Terry Hills Nursing Home.

Bertie had the honour of being our oldest donor. She enrolled early in 2002 when she heard about the donor program on radio, and wondered if her 101-year-old brain would be any good to medical science. When told that it would be, she replied: “I will be happy to help and hope my example will encourage others to do the same.” She impressed the UoB assessment team with her knowledge, humour and alertness. Despite impaired vision and hearing problems, she scored 100% on the memory and language tests.

Born in Sydney in 1901 – the year of Queen Victoria’s death – Alberta was the youngest of six children. She became a telephonist, shorthand-typist and private secretary; she played tennis and loved singing. She never married. During 2003 her heart went out to victims of NSW bushfires and she donated her treasured collection of soft toys to children who had lost their possessions in the infernos.

Recent years of Bertie’s long and dignified life were spent in contentment at the Terry Hills nursing home, listening to the radio and talking books. She enjoyed remarkably good health and retained a wonderful sense of humour and community spirit.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2006, at age 104, Bertie’s wish to donate her brain to science was fulfilled. Because she retained such excellent memory, language and cognitive skills, her brain will be of enormous value to researchers in the study of healthy ageing as well as age-related diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

Bertie was very special to all of us at UoB. It was a pleasure to meet this beautiful lady and get to know her over the last few years. She will be missed.

**Sparks Fly as Retired Electrician Takes Plunge from 4000m**

UOB donor, John, was jumping with joy at the thought of turning 79 and wanted to do something different to celebrate. So he used his pension money to make a parachute jump. John had always wanted to sky dive but kept putting it off. The death of his wife and the realisation that he wouldn’t be around forever prompted him to decide it was now or never.

On a beautiful afternoon recently he and his ‘trainer’ went into free fall for about 700m before they opened their parachute and calmly drifted to a soft landing in the fields below at Warnervale.

“It was absolutely marvellous, just like landing on velvet,” Mr Stevenson said.

Would he do it again? “For sure and certain”. A mate has promised to shout him another dive on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*There is a book called ‘Disorder in the Court’. These are things people actually said in court, word for word, taken down and now published by court reporters – who had the torment of staying calm while these exchanges were actually taking place:*

*Q: Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?*

*A: No*

*Q: Did you check for blood pressure?*

*A: No*

*Q: Did you check for breathing?*

*A: No*

*Q: So, then, it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?*

*A: No*

*Q: How can you be so sure, Doctor?*

*A: Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.*

*Q: But could the patient have still been alive, nevertheless?*

*A: Yes, it is possible that he could have been alive and practicing law somewhere.*

*Q: What gear were you in at the moment of the accident?*

*A: Gucci sweatshirt and Reeboks.*

**MRI scan: A number of donors have now had an MRI scan, and I will shortly be making appointments from August onwards. Please phone (02)9036 9027 on Thursday/Friday if you would like to be included. Appointments are on Tuesday afternoons. Helen**