

## In memoriam Éric Dewailly (1957-2014)

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## **Éric Dewailly**

**(1957-2014)**

Dr. Éric Dewailly's early professional career included a position in community health at CHUL's Community Health Department in Quebec City, as a consulting physician (1987-1989), and then as the coordinator of the Quebec City area environmental health team until 1998. From 1998 onward, he headed the CHUQ Public Health Research Unit (CHUL). He was also a full professor in environmental health at the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine (Faculty of Medicine) at Université Laval from 1997 onward.

Dr. Dewailly's research had several main themes: the impact of oceanic pollution on human health, such as contamination of the marine food chain and exposure of fishing communities to heavy metals and organochlorines; the effect of these contaminants on the reproductive, immune, and neurological systems; marine toxins; and other subjects. He made over 500 scientific presentations, published over 200 scientific peer-reviewed articles, and received over \$80 million in grants. From 2000 to 2006, he sat on the scientific board of the CIHR Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health. He was also the director of the CIHR-funded Nasivvik Centre for Inuit Health. He had responsibilities in various scientific networks, including ArcticNet, Québec Océan, CIHR Network for autism, AquaNet, Global Health Research Initiative, FRSQ Environmental Health Research Network, and FRSQ Québec Population Health Research Network.

Dr. Dewailly participated in the Coastal GOOS Panel of UNESCO and various expert panels of the World Health Organization. He represented Canada on the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program/Human Health Expert Group, was co-chair of the environmental group of the International Union for Circumpolar Health, and headed the medical section of the International Center for Ocean and Human Health at the Bermuda Biological Station for Research (now BIOS). He was appointed 2008 adjunct professor at the Institut Louis Malardé in Papeete (French Polynesia). From 2002 onward he served as the director of the Atlantis Mobile Laboratory program funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

He earned a degree in medicine from the University of Lille (France, 1982), and then completed specialized studies in public health (CES, Amiens, 1983). After doing his residency in community health (Université Laval, 1983-1985), he earned a Master's degree in epidemiology (Université Laval, 1987) and a Ph.D. in toxicology (Lille, 1990).

(adapted from the Council of Canadian Academies)

**STILL I DON'T KNOW**  
**A Tribute to Éric Dewailly**

**STILL I DON'T KNOW**

Still I don't know the exact word, the exact thing  
That would convey the content of our undefined link  
Friendship? Mutual amenity?  
Crony? Brotherhood? Fraternity?

The closest link is from that Old Time, perhaps,  
To name that which will forever last,  
That which happens so seldom in a lifetime  
You won't need all the fingers of one hand

But more than five, no doubt, I'll need  
To remember where we both met and agreed  
Bits and clues of an explanation  
To the common course of our navigation

**SCIENCE**

In Ottawa, a strange trio  
Imagine the moment, the tableau  
The Honourable Ghislain Otis: "Oxfeuuuurd peuuuurfect English"  
Then me, and my accent "Saguenay-ish"

And finally Éric, the third pal,  
With his English, "Quite Frenchie-style."  
Defending all, with gravity  
Our program on food security

Aftermath debriefing, among ourselves  
We were laughing, convinced that on shelves  
Our project should be put, for eternity,  
In spite of our answers of true sincerity

We recall: "Final question for your defence:  
Will your project make a difference?"  
Otis began: "As foour zze jurists are concerned  
Improving lââwz is at the hhearth of our more foolish dreamzz"

I said: "We will make a différennce lala"  
Éric: "Becauze, for choure, will dô goudd science"  
And then we got the big bucks grant!  
Worked for years with hordes of students!

Often he said: “Do good science”  
In front of whatever audience:  
Learned societies, leaders, politicians  
Research partners, colleagues, students.

He meant, I know for sure:  
Rigour, state of the art, never obscure  
Mastering rules and tools of one’s science field  
Shedding light under the shield

He meant, I have no doubt:  
Useful questions, curtailed, cut out  
From our partners’ necessity  
To answer needs, right now, today!

He meant, I testify:  
Multiple disciplines glaze as question justifies;  
Contribute all you can but ego to content;  
Leave the leadership to the most competent

#### LAB AND PEOPLE

First time, out of nowhere, he called me  
Asking for help with household economy  
Public health advice he had to make  
Not knowing the impact of what was at stake

Second time, I called him back  
Wishing to pursue, wishing to give back.  
Broadening the scope, the team, and the linkage  
Engaged to open up a new field of knowledge

Third time, he asked again  
And together we designed  
What was to become health and social sides  
Of the ArcticNet program, which still lives

Track records are full of numbers  
Diplomas, speeches, reports, and papers  
But altogether they leave only silence  
On the heart, the true meaning of the experience

We said, we shared, we believed  
Life is too short, how ironic, not to work with those we love  
Teaming up with good persons gives the joy to give  
The privilege always to receive

It opens wide the doors of generosity  
By which accomplishment comes to maturity  
We said, we shared, we believed  
Independence of our labs these values guaranteed

We created our programs not for the honours  
Nor the prizes, nor to raise up the ladders  
But to keep up with our values and freedom,  
To work the way we believe science shall be done

#### THÉMIS AND STELLA POLARIS

Last time I met him by this very river  
I was launching a book at our club for boaters  
It was a novel, an unusual event in our circle  
Of serious writers, staying far away from fable

“In that small grey matter of mine,” he said,  
“A thousand short stories are being stored  
That I will write down, one day  
For my grandchildren, I hope I may.”

Today, his blue sailboat *Thémis*  
Side by side with my *Stella Polaris*  
Lie down on their dry bed for winter  
We share that, too, together

#### STILL I DON'T KNOW

Still I don't know the exact word, nor the exact thing  
That would convey the content of our undefined link  
Friendship? Mutual amenity?  
Crony? Brotherhood? Fraternity?

The closest link is from that Old Time, perhaps  
Binding together seagoing chaps  
Or simple craftsmen under one ensign  
Since we were both fellow seamen

The closest link is from that Old Time, perhaps,  
To name that which will forever last,  
That which happens so seldom in a lifetime  
You won't need all the fingers of one hand.

Gérard Duhaime  
read on-board the *AML Louis-Jolliet*, October 31, 2014  
19th Inuit Studies Conference, Quebec City



Figure 1. Éric Dewailly's sailboat *Thémis*. Photo: Gérard Duhaime.