

Deeply missing my career idol and role model — Professor Perry L. McCarty

Yi Qian (✉)

School of Environment, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China

© The Author(s) 2023. This article is published with open access at link.springer.com and journal.hep.com.cn

Upon hearing the news of Professor Perry L. McCarty's passing, I felt deeply saddened and heartbroken, and was unable to contain my emotions. I couldn't help but reminiscing about the cherished moments we shared together and the valuable lessons I learned from him over the years.

I first met Professor Perry L. McCarty in 1985. Taking the opportunity of attending a conference in the United States, I visited Professor McKinney at the University of Kansas, the first American expert in my field that I had ever known of. I told him that I was very interested in Professor McCarty's research on aerobic bio-filters and wanted to learn more. "Let me give Perry a call," he said immediately, and in less than five minutes, Perry and I became connected. It turned out that Professor McKinney had been Professor McCarty's teacher and mentor in the past. I changed my flight immediately and flew to California the next day, where I met Professor McCarty, a world-renowned expert in water pollution control, and visited the aerobic bio-filter he established and their water pollution control laboratory. We had inspiring yet amiable conversations, and a friendship that lasted for over 30 years ensued.

Over the past three decades, Professor Perry L. McCarty has had a great number of academic exchanges and collaborations with the Chinese water treatment community. He was invited to be a chair professor at Tsinghua University, and we also frequently ran into each other at international conferences. We hold the same view on some of the scientific directions. For example, we both

emphasized on the fact that urban wastewater should be reused on the basis of harmlessness, with the priority being irrigation in agriculture. Professor Perry L. McCarty had also inspired me many times. On the academic symposium commemorating the 100th anniversary of the introduction of the activated sludge process, held in Hong Kong in August 2014, Professor Perry L. McCarty not only acknowledged the contribution of the activated sludge process to the field, but also discussed the energy-saving advantages of anaerobic biological treatment, and advocated for its greater promotion and application in the future. His forward-thinking views inspired me to focus more on the research and development of anaerobic biological treatment technology.

In 2006, as was invited to be the inaugural Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Frontiers of Environmental Science & Engineering* (FESE), I started to establish an international editorial board. Professor Perry L. McCarty was the first name came into my mind. He readily agreed to be one of the inaugural Associate Editors-in-Chief and served for a longer time than myself. For more than a decade (2007–2018), he has been committed to the international development of FESE journal making important contributions.

Professor Perry L. McCarty used to be the head of the international expert group for the international evaluation of the Department of Environmental Science and Engineering at Tsinghua University in 2010. The experts recommended to let young teachers spend more time in the classroom, to which point I expressed initial doubt. I told Professor McCarty that we already have many young teachers in the classroom. He immediately asked, "Are you referring to Professor Xia Huang?" I understood then that the suggestion he and the foreign experts were

Received June 26, 2023

✉ Corresponding author

E-mail: qiany@tsinghua.edu.cn

This is a non-peer reviewed article.

making was for more and younger teachers to be given more training opportunities. FESE journal has been featuring to support the development of young scholars in recent years, which is a continuation of the spirit of Professor McCarty. I think Professor McCarty must be pleased to see this.

For someone with so much renowned achievement and worldwide fame, Professor Perry L. McCarthy had always acted as a down-to-earth person and a loving friend. Upon his invitation, I once gave a lecture at Stanford University and got to know many of his students and colleagues. I learned that he had many wholesome and grounded habits: he always went to the student cafeteria for lunch at Stanford University; he often rode a bicycle on campus and would sometimes even carry someone on the back seat while he zoomed. In Beijing, he took the subway and public buses to visit scenic spots like Beihai. One time, when we were talking about the Olympics, he told me that he had participated in the 110-meter hurdles race when he was young, which impressed me so much. When we were together, we also talked about homely things. At the end of the day, we were both

senior people with children, grandchildren, and a continued love for life.

I am grieving Professor McCarty's departure, but I believe that wherever he is now, he is at peace. His voice, his smile, his actions, and his brilliant academic achievements will continue to be of great inspiration to everyone in the field, motivating generations after generations of young people to contribute their efforts to a cleaner and more beautiful Earth.

Conflict of Interests Dr. Yi Qian was the inaugural Editor-in-Chief of *Frontiers of Environmental Science & Engineering* from 2007 to 2014.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.