With the passing away of Herbert Fleisch in 2007, a great personality and an internationally renowned scientist has left us. The AO Foundation owes him a tremendous debt of gratitude for his excellent bone research and for his enthusiasm to make research by AO accepted worldwide.

Herbert Fleisch grew up in Lausanne, Switzerland. His father, a professor of physiology, conceived the worldwide renowned diagnostic tools in lung physiology (Fleisch spirometer). For our own early research in shock induced disseminated micro vascular thrombosis, he constructed the agglomerator, a micro filtration method, which allowed the detection of micro emboli in the streaming blood; a method which could even today help to clarify clinically important issues related to intramedullary nailing.

Herbert studied medicine and started his research in 1959 in the USA laboratory of Prof Newman who introduced him to the biochemistry of the pyrophosphates, the precursors of the later Diphosphonates and today’s Bis-phosphonates.
For the first few years the Laboratory actively investigated hemorrhagic shock, burns, and wound healing. When Herbert became director of the Lab in 1963, this heterogeneous work group fell under his administrative responsibility. With his biochemist, Dr Bisaz, he took up experimental research in bone biochemistry. His main interest was bone formation and destruction with special interest in the effects of the Phosphonates. In the early critical years of the AO, he supported our biomechanics group which analyzed pressure necrosis and helped to prove to the world that compression in internal fixation had no deleterious effect on living bone. Also under his guidance in the laboratory in Davos was the AO documentation center, the brainchild of Maurice Müller. In 1967 the structure of the AO institute was reshuffled. Herbert left with his biochemistry group to head the newly founded Institute for Patho-Physiology at the University of Bern. Maurice Müller moved the AO documentation to Bern while Martin Allgöwer took over the Department of Surgery at the University of Basel transferring shock, burn, and wound healing research to Basel. The group remaining in Davos was a small one of five people focusing on mechanical research supporting the AO.

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Herbert was a great teacher. Along with Robert Schenk, he made bone a living reality with their superb lectures on “Structure and Physiology of Bone”. His lectures on frontiers in research distinguished the AO courses from pure technology workshops and provided the scientific credibility that the AO required for its new operative fracture care methods.

The early days of AO research were demanding in a setting of daily threatening financial insecurity. We owe much to people like Herbert Fleisch and the early trustees of the Foundation of the Research Institute in Davos who prevented it from running dry with financial support out of their own pockets. We must not forget that the root of the brilliant success of the AO Foundation and its business partners was the risky personal engagement of enthusiastic people like Herbert, an outstanding pioneer in a difficult setting.