REAR VIEW MIRROR --
A LOOKING BACK

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I remember the 1960 meeting of AMCBT with fondness; it was first time I ever attended one. I was working at Parsons College at the time, having decided that I wasn’t really cut out for life as a microbiologist teaching at a medical school. Parsons had advertised in Science for biologists and I applied, and lo, I got the job. Parsons was in Fairfield, Iowa. I say "was" because it no longer exists as Parsons; today it is the home of the Mahararesh Mahesh University of Transcendental Meditation. The senior biologist there was Dr. Floyd Von Ohlen, a terrific mentor and grand gentleman. He had been in on the formation of AMCBT and received his notice of the meeting for 1960. He couldn’t attend but encouraged his two new hires to go. My fondness of memory doesn’t include the trip up to Mankato, Minnesota from Fairfield, since we made the trip in a VW beetle with a malfunctioning heater (didn’t they all malfunction?), so we were either freezing or asphyxiating, remember we were traveling north. The meeting itself made the trip worthwhile as far as I was concerned, because then, as happens now, the membership welcomed all the newcomers warmly and really listened to anything they had to add to the sessions. The discussions were all on what it is we teach and how to teach it better. The meeting of 1960 followed the format established at Drake, a series of sessions each dealing with different aspects of biological science and covering the new advances in each area. Leland Johnson’s idea of updating teachers in content and method was the key to the meetings. There were also two invited speakers, Dr. David F. Green, who spoke on Biochemical Machines, and Dr. A. Glen Richards, who spoke on the AIBS High School Biology Course, and also previewed one of the films prepared for this course.

1970 found AMCBT at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. The theme for that meeting was “Developing an Awareness: Can the Environment Survive?” Staying in the forefront of environmental awareness which was beginning to find its voice in America, AMCBT presented a series of Group Meetings and Workshops on studies of the environment, techniques of study and new approaches to environmental education. Two invited speakers, Dr. Richard V. Bovbjerg, Director of the Lakeside Laboratory of the University of Iowa and Dr. Leif L. Marking of the Fish and Wildlife Services in Wisconsin, presented different aspects of the environmental issue.

The 1980 meeting of AMCBT was held at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. The theme for that meeting was “L.A.B. Curricula - Learning Applicable Biology”. It was centered around different forms of hands-on biology teaching (labs in the most general sense) and used a variety of forms of presentation, from hardware to mental-ware. There were three speakers at this meeting. The opening address was by Dr. Fred Brown of Buena Vista speaking on “The Art of Teaching Science”. That afternoon, Dr. Ralph Sinclair of the EPA spoke on “Exotic Clams vs. T.V.A.”, and the evening speaker was Dr. Fred Williams, University of Cincinnati, who spoke on “The Greatest Lab in the World-The Cincinnati Zoo”.

1990 found us at a venue we will be revisiting this year, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana. The theme was “Biotechnology In Education”. It featured a considerable number of hands-on technology workshops as well as a bunch of how-to-use technology in teaching and designing labs. There was a ‘Film/Video Festival’ organized by Wallace Weber of Southwest Missouri State University. This had been a very popular section of previous meetings. The opening address was by Jerry Hinkley, College of Lake City, Grayslake, IL who presented “The Galapagos Archipelago - Multimedia Presentation”. The evening session address was presented by one of our longstanding members, John Jungck of Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin, who spoke on “The Genetic Code as a Code: The Past 30 Years”.

As you can see from the above, our meetings have always been varied, but they have always focused on how to best teach whatever it is we want our students to obtain from our classes. We always try to show how to best use the tools which keep appearing, as if by magic, whenever some new fad hits the educational headlines. What the above cannot convey, however, are the personal interactions which always accompany these meetings. The great majority of attendees are warm, caring folk, who just happen to be in biological education, who want to share with their colleagues their concerns and suggestions about how best to serve their students.

See you in Terre Haute.