

Into the Lion's Den

Barrie Schwartz

Prologue

In a recent article titled, [“Dr. Walter McCrone’s Research on the Shroud of Turin Under a Microscope.”](#) Joe Marino, one of the most prolific Shroud scholars of modern times, briefly mentioned an interesting event that I participated in back in 2002, which I had originally described to him in a phone conversation. Upon reading his article, I realized there was a lot more to the story that should be told, so I decided to write this article and include all the details (for the historical record). So thank you Joe for providing me with the incentive to do so.

Sometime in 2002 I received a rare call from my good friend Ray Rogers (who hardly ever used the phone). He was suffering from prostate cancer, which would ultimately take his life in 2005, and which made long conversations of any kind very difficult and painful for him. Our friendship had grown over the years due mainly to my creating the Shroud.com website, which he seemed particularly fond of. Of course, I was thrilled by his support in the early days of the site since Rogers allowed me to publish some of his excellent papers and articles. I took that as a serious compliment, considering how fussy Ray was about anything relating to science (and especially chemistry). For those who might not know who he was, Ray was the Lead Chemist on the STURP team from Los Alamos National Laboratory.

This particular call was different than some of our previous conversations, because he told me his cancer, which he had had for more than 15 years by then, was progressing and made it very difficult for him to travel. He explained that he had been invited to speak at a conference of the American Chemical Society (ACS) in San Antonio, Texas, but his illness made it impossible for him to accept. Instead, he suggested that I take his place and make the presentation on his behalf. In fact, he had already given the ACS my name and contact information!

I was shocked! I remember asking him if it were wise for me, a man with only a Bachelor's degree in photography, to represent him and speak to a room full of prominent Ph.D. chemists. His one word reply was “absolutely!” When Ray Rogers asked you to do something, you just said “yes.” Frankly, I was honored that he showed so much confidence in my abilities, so I agreed to create a PowerPoint that covered the STURP science and conclusions and challenged Walter McCrone's claims. At that moment, I really didn't fully understand what I was getting myself into.

Not long after my conversation with Ray, I received a phone call from the then president of the American Chemical Society. (Sorry, I don't recall his name). His first question was, “Are you a chemist?” I was honest and replied, “No, I am a professional photographer.” There was a rather

long pause after which he said, "Okay." Apparently, if Ray Rogers recommended you, formal credentials were less of an issue.

Sadly, on July 10, 2002, Walter McCrone passed away. Ray had told me that Walter was highly regarded by the folks in the ACS. In fact, although I didn't find out until much later, the ACS had awarded Walter their highest honor for his work on the Shroud! Of course, that only added to the pressure I was feeling to properly prepare and represent the work of Rogers and the STURP team.

I spent the next month working on the presentation. Since I was still operating my video production/photography studio in Los Angeles, I could only work on it in my "spare" time. I also understood that it was very important for me to represent the work of STURP accurately and professionally. After all, most of my target audience had doctorate degrees. There would be no fooling them.

Fortunately, my fifteen years of experience working in the medical field as an imaging consultant to the Laser Research and Technology Development Laboratory at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles had prepared me well for the task. Over the course of my time there, I worked closely with the researchers (physicists, chemists, engineers and medical doctors) and produced over 500 presentations for the lab's director, Dr. Warren Grundfest, who presented them to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Congress and at academic and medical conferences around the world. I was also a contributor to many papers and articles that were published in the medical literature. Still, I was feeling a lot of pressure. In this case, *I* was the guy making the presentation.

The conference was being held on Monday evening, November 11, 2002, in the large auditorium at the beautiful Witte Museum in San Antonio, Texas and was promoted as a "Shroud of Turin Lecture/Symposium." I arrived in San Antonio the day before the event and checked into the hotel. In mid-October I had found out there were two other speakers on the agenda. These included Stephen J. Mattingly, Ph.D., Professor of Microbiology at the University of Texas in San Antonio, and David Stoney, Ph.D., Clinical Professor of Forensic Sciences at the University of Illinois, who had also recently replaced the late Walter McCrone as the new Director of the McCrone Research Institute! At that point I definitely understood what Daniel must have felt as he entered the lion's den!

At around 5:00 pm on Monday I was picked up at the hotel by one of the organization's chemists, who had volunteered to drive me to the museum. He happened to be Jewish and knew very little about the Shroud, but reminded me that McCrone was very highly regarded by the ACS. In fact, he was the first to inform me that the ACS had recently awarded Walter their highest honor for his work on the Shroud. I told him I was going to challenge McCrone's conclusions about the Shroud and he simply smiled and basically said, "Good luck!" I suggested that we continue our conversation after the event when he was driving me back to the hotel and after seeing my presentation. He smiled again and agreed.

Upon arrival at the museum, I was introduced to the ACS president and the other two speakers. I had first met Stephen Mattingly the year before at the “2nd International Conference on the Shroud of Turin” held in Dallas, Texas, but this was the first time I met Dr. Stoney, who was very pleasant and cordial. As we took our seats, the three of us speakers sat together, side by side in the front row of the auditorium near one of the two flights of steps leading up to the stage.

I was the first speaker on the program and delivered an 80 slide presentation titled, “Twenty-Five Years of Shroud Science: A Personal Perspective.” I started with an overview of what we knew about the Shroud at that moment based on the science. The presentation next summarized the testing done by STURP and presented many images of the team at work, the instrumentation they used and some of the photomicroscopy and UV fluorescence images of the Shroud itself. I then included a list of the prestigious scientific journals in which their work was published and was very careful to use only the peer reviewed data to challenge all of McCrone’s claims about the Shroud, proving it was not a painting, a scorch or a photograph. I pointed out that most of his work was published in *The Microscope*, a journal he owned and edited, and not in any actual peer reviewed publications. I also explained my own personal background as a secular Jew to let them know I had no emotional attachment to the Shroud. My only concern was with the truth.

When you are on the stage and presenting to a live audience, you can easily gauge their response by the expressions on their faces. I saw that they were interested in what I had to say but they remained mainly neutral (or doubtful) in general. The only time I saw pronounced changes in their expressions was when I informed them that Walter never even saw the Shroud, was not a member of our team and took no part in our physical examination of the cloth in Turin. He had only examined sticky tape samples lifted from the surface of the Shroud after our return. They looked surprised.

Apparently, Walter never corrected the mistaken assumption that he was a member of STURP and even contributed to that assumption with some of the articles he wrote. A perfect example is an article that was published in the May/June 1981 issue of the magazine *Functional Photography*. It was titled, "What **We** Found on the Turin Shroud and How **We** Found It." [Emphasis mine]. One can definitely see how statements of that nature could be easily misinterpreted.

I spoke for about an hour and finished to a respectful applause from the audience. I had obviously given them something to think about. The ACS president then called for a break and we all adjourned to the lobby for coffee, punch and snacks. This lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes and then the lights were flashed to call everyone back to their seats.

I returned to my seat next to Dr. Mattingly, but Dr. Stoney was nowhere in sight. We looked around the audience and finally noticed him sitting alone on the opposite side of the auditorium, in the front row near the other set of steps leading to the stage. I can’t say for sure what made him decide to sit separately from us, but it appeared as if he didn’t want to sit next to me, perhaps because of my challenge to McCrone’s conclusions and his position as McCrone’s protégé and successor.

Under those circumstances, I can actually understand how he might have felt. Although I never attacked McCrone personally, I certainly challenged his conclusions about the Shroud and pointed out the lack of peer review in his work. That may have caught Dr. Stoney off guard, since he was presenting at an organization that admired McCrone and he probably felt he was on “safe” ground. I am sure he didn’t expect someone would get up and carefully challenge all of his former boss’s conclusions. Especially a guy who was *only* a photographer. Maybe I made him uncomfortable.

Next up in the program was Dr. Stoney, whose presentation was titled, “Dr. McCrone’s Microscopical and Microchemical Examination of Tapes from the Shroud of Turin.” As expected, he went through all of Walter’s work and restated all of Walter’s conclusions that I had just challenged in my own presentation. I sensed that he was somewhat frustrated by the lack of response he was receiving from the audience, because at one point he actually stopped and reminded them that the ACS had awarded Walter their highest honor for his work on the Shroud. He paused, apparently waiting for some response (applause?), but instead was greeted with absolute silence. It was a rather awkward moment.

Dr. Stoney finished to polite applause and went back to his seat at the opposite side of the auditorium. The final speaker was Dr. Steve Mattingly, whose presentation was titled, “The Role of Human Skin Bacteria in the Formation of Photographic-like Images on Linen.” I eventually worked with Dr. Mattingly to evaluate his image formation theory and the images he created, which relied on direct contact only and did not encode spatial or topographic or distance data into the resulting image density like the image on the Shroud. To this day he continues to promote his theory in spite of the evidence that shows it cannot create an image with the same characteristics as the Shroud. Of course, he is a professor of microbiology and not an imaging specialist.

The event ended and I looked for the gentleman who had brought me to the museum and who had volunteered to drive me back to the hotel. I found him, and after shaking some hands and saying thanks to the organizers, he and I left and got into his car. Of course, I was anxious to hear his thoughts on McCrone after hearing my presentation. Once again, he smiled and said I had given the organization “a lot to think about.” We left it at that.

In the end, I felt I had done a rather good job in presenting the data that showed McCrone was wrong about the Shroud. I didn’t have the credibility of Ray Rogers, but I presented what scientists respect the most: the data published in credible scientific journals. Of course, I will never know if I changed any minds, but I do know that I created enough doubts to make them think about it.

Later that evening I was picked up by some friends I had made via Shroud.com, a local San Antonio policeman and his wife, and they graciously took me out for a superb Tex-Mex dinner and a brief tour of San Antonio. It was a perfect way to end what had been a somewhat stressful day for me. I had survived my journey to the Lion’s Den!

Epilogue

Once I returned to my studio in Los Angeles, it was back to work as usual. I burned a copy of my ACS presentation onto a CD and mailed it off to Ray Rogers. It took some time before I got any response, but on November 22, 2002, I received the following e-mail from Ray and am reprinting it below in its entirety. I was even more surprised to see the Copy To's on Ray's e-mail, which included noted Shroud scholars Emanuela Marinelli, Dorothy Crispino, Bill Meacham, and Larry Schwalbe! Here it is:

Barrie:

I just got the CD of your presentation at the San Antonio ACS meeting.
I am terribly disappointed..... (Did I get you? - - - read down).

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After something like that, I would have expected the "Second Coming" or at least the end of the world. You did the best job I have ever seen at an ACS meeting, and I have been going to them since 1948. You were the best guy who could have done it. A perfect balance.

And then, it had been a long time since I looked at VP-8 analyses (you know how I felt about that). You didn't jizzle data, and the 3-D actually means something. Did you notice the hands, the moustache, the hair, and the eyes? For example, the moustache stands out as much as the nose, and the fingers are barely visible. As I recall, the only way we got a good, clear look at the hands was in the UV photograph. Is that correct?

I am getting pretty excited about a bunch of experiments I am doing. I think I am on the verge of explaining a bunch of observations. It is much fun. After all of these years, I think chemistry is actually good for something.

A standing ovation to you,
Ray

Upon receipt of Ray's e-mail (and after picking myself up off the floor), I drafted a rather lengthy, detailed and somewhat technical response to him, which I won't include here. However, my reply started with the following sentence: "You have no idea how much I appreciate your comments, (even if you did start off by scaring the hell out of me)!" Ray did have a great sense of humor (most of the time).

You might also have noticed his comment about the VP-8 image analyzer in his above e-mail. Ray was a chemist and not an imaging specialist, and for the longest time didn't quite grasp the significance of the encoded spatial data in the Shroud's image. In fact, it was one of the few issues we actually argued about. I think seeing my presentation was the first time its importance became clearer to him. I could sense he finally understood and was even excited about it when he said, "...the 3-D actually means something!" I was thrilled.

But the story doesn't end there. Last year (nearly 20 years after the above event), I received a phone call from one of our website viewers. Sadly, I didn't get his name at the time. He started the conversation by saying, "You don't know me, but I was at the Shroud presentation you made to the ACS in 2002 at the Witte Museum in San Antonio."

I was truly surprised, as I had never before heard from anyone who had attended that meeting and was very curious to hear his opinion. Earlier in this article I said, "I will never know if I changed any minds..." but that wasn't entirely true. It turns out the above caller was a Ph.D. chemist himself and he told me that he (and many of his colleagues) had been very impressed with my Shroud presentation and in the end, had rejected McCrone's conclusions! And it only took twenty years for me to get that feedback! Still slightly in shock, I told him I was very grateful for his call. I didn't realize it at the time, but he ultimately provided me with the perfect ending to this story!

Barrie Schwartz
October 24, 2022

And finally, assuming you are still reading this, here are a few links to some related materials that you might find interesting:

[Answering A Skeptic](#) by Barrie Schwartz (Response dated 16 May 2014 to an e-mail received from Gary A. Kentgen on 6 January 2014) [posted 7 June 2014]

[Remembering Ray Rogers: A Personal Reflection on the Man and His Work](#) by Barrie Schwartz (PowerPoint Presentation in pdf format) originally presented at the St. Louis Shroud Conference, "Shroud of Turin: The Controversial Intersection of Faith and Science," on October 12, 2014