

When a Padawan meets his master again

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Professor Bill Gibson

“It was a privilege to have conducted an interview with Professor Gibson, my mentor and teacher, during the six months I was the Graham Fraser Foundation (GFF) Fellow in Sydney in 2005. Twelve years later, I am absolutely delighted to have been given another opportunity by *ENT & Audiology News* to interview the great man, Prof Bill Gibson AO (Order of Australia).” **Professor Henry Pau**



Figure 1. Prof Bill Gibson, Henry Pau and his son Joshua enjoying a day out on Prof Gibson's boat, 'Mad Wax' on Sydney Harbour in 2005.

Prof, what have you been up to for the past 12 years, professionally and personally?

In 2012, I retired from the Chair of Otolaryngology at the University of Sydney and stopped performing cochlear implant surgeries at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the Children's Hospital at Westmead. I continued doing surgeries at the Mater Hospital until June 2014, when I turned 70. I now sometimes act as a surgical assistant when there is an interesting case. Last Friday, the biomedical engineer, Dr Halit Sanli, assisted me in monitoring an electrocochleogram (EcochG) during a labyrinthectomy and single-sided cochlear implant surgery. I do miss the surgeries!

I still go out to the Children's Hospital at Westmead with Halit to do the EcochGs and I published an article recently in the free, online journal, *Frontiers in Neuroscience* on 'The clinical uses of electrocochleography'.

I continue to see patients at the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre (SCIC) at Gladesville and at an audiology practice in Bondi Junction. I am the founding director of the SCIC, which now has 12 branches, and I do a lot of the paperwork to spare the medical director, Associate Professor Cathy

Birman and the other dozen or so surgeons.

Alex and I are taking much more time off these days. In June 2017, we visited the UK and France where I attended the IFOS ENT World Congress in Paris. In March 2018 we will take a cruise from Sydney to London! My motorboat, 'Mad Wax' (Figure 1) is getting old and may have to be sold (tears).

I am really pleased that the Graham Fraser Foundation Fellowship (GFF) has been revived, thanks to MED-EL, and I enjoy meeting the fellows who come to Sydney to be mentored by Cathy Birman.

The Menière's Research Laboratory at the University of Sydney is going well and so far, the head of the laboratory, Dr Daniel Brown's research is not contradicting my theories on the cause of the attacks in Menière's disease. In September 2017, we held the Fourth Annual Menière's Disease Research Symposium in Sydney, Australia.

What are your thoughts on the current training in ENT – both in Australia and the UK?

I worry about the restricted hours lessening the clinical exposure for trainees. Although when I observe the trainees they all seem to be doing well.

“Prof Gibson is the complete package of a true academic surgeon: an intellectual powerhouse in research, an excellent diagnostician and the most gifted technical surgeon.”



Figure 2. Henry Pau, Tina Allen (author of Prof Gibson's biography), Patricia Fraser (holding Prof's biography) and Bill Gibson at the GFF reunion dinner in June 2017 (NB: Kaarina Allen is taking the photo).



Figure 3. The two Professors at the GFF reunion dinner in June 2017.

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inspirational and a gentleman. I am one of the lucky few who has got to know him and has been taught by him. He is the complete package of a true academic surgeon: an intellectual powerhouse in research, an excellent diagnostician and the most gifted technical surgeon. He really has taught me most of the things I know in otology and vestibular medicine and I will always be in debt to him.

It was so great seeing Prof and his wife Alex in London in June 2017 at the third reunion of the GFF fellows, where we also celebrated the release of his biography (Figures 2-3). *Bill Gibson: Pioneering Bionic Ear Surgeon* by Tina K Allen is a must read for all, especially for ENT surgeons including trainees, consultants and professors.

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INTERVIEWED BY

Professor Henry Pau, MD FRCSEd (ORL-HNS) FRCSEng (ad eundem),

Consultant Otorhinolaryngologist, University Hospitals of Leicester, UK.

From 2018, ENT Specialist, OT&P Medical Practice, 1 D'Aguilar Street, Central, Hong Kong.

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What are your thoughts on the future of otological implantology?

It is an exciting future. We are already doing single-sided cochlear implants, in both children and adults. I will be speaking about this at the Siebold Memorial Symposium on Hearing Implants in Japan in November 2017. I do not believe it will be long before vestibular implants become clinically available.

When I started performing cochlear implant surgery on young children from 1987 onwards, we were not allowed to implant both ears. This was because the educational authorities of the day said that if the implants failed, the children would be left with no residual hearing. How things

have changed because now our surgeons at the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre are routinely performing bilateral CIs on children under one year of age.

Apart from ‘not being sheep’, do you have any other advice for our trainees?

It is a good idea to observe experts and to begin by copying their techniques. Then the trainees should become more critical and think of how they might improve the techniques themselves. Finally as experienced consultants, they should have developed their own techniques and be passing these ideas on to their trainees.

Prof Bill ‘Mad Wax’ Gibson is truly