

# Andrew V. Nalbandov: A Short Biography (1912–1986)



Andrew V. Nalbandov

Andrew V. Nalbandov was born in Simferopol on the Crimean Peninsula, on July 4, 1912. His parents were persons of prominence both politically and economically who were part of the landed class in Russia before 1917. His father, Vladimir, earned degrees in botany, architecture, and law. He worked for the government before the revolution. His mother, Alexandra, was a cousin of Prince Felix Iusupov, one of the Russian patriots who killed Rasputin in 1916. Six of her brothers were executed by the Bolsheviks.

It is reputed that during the Russian revolution Andy witnessed the shooting of his grandmother by revolutionaries after which his family fled to Constantinople. In Constantinople he was separated from his parents for nearly a year, finally being reunited with them by efforts of the American Red Cross.

The family moved to Nice and Paris, France and then to Munich, Germany. Andy's father assumed a leadership role of Russian emigrés in Germany at that time.

His sister, Kathryn, maintained the so-called "Russian Room" in Munich during World War II. This facility provided a safe haven for a wide variety of emigrés: those from concentration camps, deserters, Soviet POWs, and many non-communist Russians.

Andy earned his bachelor's degree from the Technical University in Munich in 1932 and worked at various non-academic jobs in Germany and France during the difficult years of the Depression.

In 1935 he accepted a fellowship at Oklahoma State University and earned a master's degree and married Olga Gabrielle Oliver, a fellow graduate student. Subsequently in 1937, he matriculated in the doctoral program of the University of Wisconsin where he completed his work in animal genetics in the laboratory of Lester Casida. He moved to the University of Illinois in 1940 as an instructor in genetics. Because he had never taken a course in poultry science, he received a cut in his initial salary at Illinois, a story which he enjoyed telling. This event proved to be ironic because many of the major discoveries in avian physiology were made in Nalbandov's laboratory at the University of Illinois.

I first met A.V. Nalbandov in the winter of 1960, on an interview for graduate school. Even though he was already one of the foremost reproductive biologists in the United States, he met me at the train station in Champaign and graciously hosted the remainder of my visit. I was accepted into his program a few weeks after my visit.

In the spring of my first year at Illinois, I was required to take A.V. Nalbandov's course in Animal Reproduction. Nalbandov was an excellent teacher and showman. He did not use slides or other visual aides, only the blackboard in his lectures. He had published a book on the subject in which he introduced the major areas of reproductive physiology. By today's standards, the book is only an outline because many of the details of this area of science were not yet elucidated. His lectures were interesting and informative but biased by his own point of view. He was so convincing that one had to be careful so as to separate scientific fact from his opinions. He despised the laboratory rat as the experimental animal model used by so many scientists on which to perform their research. Rather, he

preferred animal research on farm animals such as sheep, cows, pigs, and chickens. He thought the rat to be a unique creation of modern science by inbreeding. He believed that the expenditure of large sums of public monies to elucidate its physiology and biochemistry was wasteful. The information obtained will not yield the type of knowledge that will solve the origins and cure of diseases and affect new strategies for improving food supply and the care of animals.

A.V. Nalbandov trained many graduate students and postdoctoral fellows who later went on to positions of eminence and leadership in academia and industry. He took a hands off approach to graduate training, always there to critique and advise but never to direct the work. He valued independence and one of his greatest contributions to his students was his insistence on developing independence in the naive student.

Nalbandov was a charter member of the Society for the Study of Reproduction (SSR) in 1967, one of the many voices who wanted this new society to provide a forum for greater student participation than any other scientific society at that time. He served as editor of its journal, *Biology of Reproduction* from 1978–1981, and made many improvements in the journal during its formative years. He was the first recipient of the Carl G. Hartman Award in 1969 and the SSR Distinguished Service Award in 1986. He was the recipient of other honors such as: the Distinguished Leadership Award of the Endocrine Society in 1974, and the Marshall Medal of the Society for the Study of Fertility in Great Britain in 1982. A most cherished honor was bestowed upon him in 1974 by his Alma Mater, a D.Sc. *honoris causa*.

In September 1986, I learned that A. V. Nalbandov died at home after a lengthy battle with lung cancer. He died on September 26, 1986. What will be his legacy? Only time will tell. I can assure you that he loved life and lived it as complete as any man that I have known. The fruits of the vine and the grains of the field and the distillates thereof and good food crowded his table of life around which sat his many friends, students, and scientific colleagues. Even though he was one of the most well-known and respected reproductive biologists of the last century and was showered with the highest awards that this area of science can bestow on one of its own and even though his colleagues around the world looked to him for leadership and advice, he always retained a certain commonness and humility.

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