

JENS PEDER HART HANSEN (1936–1998)

Jens Peder Hart Hansen has left us all too soon. He died from acute leukemia on 23 September 1998 at the Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Jens Peder was born in Copenhagen into a family of outstanding physicians. His grandfather was professor of surgery; his father, the first professor of orthopaedic surgery in Denmark. He earned his own medical degree from the University of Copenhagen in 1962, and interned in Tórshavn, capital of the Faroe Islands.

Interested in the North since his student days, when he had joined a 1955 geodetic expedition to Iceland, Jens Peder got his first chance to visit Greenland a decade later, as a military physician aboard a Danish inspection vessel patrolling the Greenland Waters.

In the family tradition, he won the university's annual gold medal in 1967 for his research on allergy to cow's milk and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Ten years later he defended his doctoral thesis, entitled "Homicide in Denmark 1945 to 1970." Following this interest, he qualified as a specialist in pathology and forensic medicine. In 1975, he became chief of Pathology at Gentofte Hospital near Copenhagen, a position he held until shortly before his death. From 1986 to 1994 he also headed the Anthropological Laboratory attached to the University of Copenhagen.

Jens Peder Hart Hansen was highly regarded in these positions, but it was his love of the Arctic and its people that endeared him to so many of us. He served the Arctic well in many different capacities. His scientific work focused on cancer epidemiology and on mummies. He initiated a high-level collaboration of epidemiologists in Alaska, Canada, and the Nordic countries to study cancer in the circumpolar population.

But Jens Peder was a great administrator, as well as an outstanding scientist. As secretary-general of the Fifth International Conference on Circumpolar Health (Copenhagen, 1981), he developed contacts in the Arctic and Antarctic scientific communities, and as president of the International Union for Circumpolar Health from 1987 to 1993, he initiated many important projects on circumpolar health.

When the now famous Greenland mummies were discovered in the Uummanaq district, Jens Peder was given custody of these invaluable 15th-century remains in his department of Pathology at Gentofte Hospital. With concern for the scientific and ethical questions raised by research on mummies, he organized a multidisciplinary team to perform medical, anthropological, and other scientific examinations—including advanced DNA testing—that would shed light on many aspects of the Thule people, their culture, and their way of life. Hansen and two Danish colleagues published a book on the mummies in 1985, and the baby mummy made the cover of *National Geographic* (172:191–207) in the same year. The book was subsequently translated into Greenlandic, Dutch, and English.



Jens Peder Hart Hansen, M.D., November 1996, 60 years. (Photo by Susanne Hart Hansen.)

The scientific results were published in 1989 as *The Mummies from Qilakitsoq: Eskimos in the 15th Century* (Meddelelser om Grønland, Man and Society 12). These important finds placed Greenland on the map of mummy research. Jens Peder was also the driving force in obtaining the invitation to host the next international conference on mummies in Nuuk, Greenland, in September 2001.

When the Danish Polar Center (DPC) was established in 1989, as a result of the dissolution of the Ministry for Greenland, it was only natural for Jens Peder to join the committee formed to define its future tasks. He insisted that the DPC should be a professional body that would give excellent service to its many scientific, administrative, and public (government agencies and private business) clients. Chairing a working group to start *Polarfronten*, a newsletter on Arctic science and economics, he insisted on quality in substance and formulation. The DPC staff came to understand why his university students had nicknamed him "the smiling executioner"! His great capacity and commitment, his clear, well-written texts, his understanding of

the need to make lasting compromises between Danish, Greenlandic, scientific, and administrative interests—as well as his kindness—will be missed. Jens Peder is an essential part of the Danish Polar Center's history.

Another important career milestone was his nomination in 1988 to the Commission for Scientific Research in Greenland, the agency that oversees all research in Greenland, providing both funding and logistical support. Jens Peder's unique ability to foster interaction of the social, natural, and medical sciences, combined with his knowledge of national and international research structures and his diplomatic skills, made him the obvious choice to chair the Commission in 1991. As chairman, he became known for his total commitment, his hard work, and his skill in conducting productive meetings. He established a scientific ethics committee for Greenland, modeled on the Danish Central Scientific Ethics Committee. Other major initiatives were a status report on Danish Polar research in 1992 and the first *National Strategy Plan for Danish Arctic Research 1993–97*, which was published in 1994. The second such plan (for 1998–2002, published in 1996) gave a high priority to research on the global environment, focusing on the Arctic, its natural resources, and social development.

Chairmanship of the Commission also brought him a broad spectrum of international contacts and trans-Arctic experience. He became a much-appreciated member of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and an invaluable advisor to its first chairman. Jens Peder's many national and international contacts invariably had pleasant experiences talking with him. Although constantly busy, he always made callers feel that their calls were joyously anticipated.

In Greenland, Jens Peder was respected as a pioneer in Greenlandic research and Arctic medicine. He was acknowledged not only as a scholar, but also as a gentleman and a well-loved and faithful friend. Understanding the role of politics in research, he co-operated closely with the political leaders responsible for health and research in Greenland, who drew on his extensive experience and knowledge, and made a huge effort to encourage research co-operation between Greenland and Denmark. With unflinching love and respect for the land and its people, he was deeply engaged in Greenlandic conditions, especially in Greenlandic public health. His Nordic Council for Arctic Medical Research work made him appreciate the ethical problems inherent in medical research in thinly populated and ethnically diverse areas like Greenland and parts of Scandinavia. His central concern and guiding principle was that research projects must be not only scientifically valid, but also tolerated and accepted by the local population, exerting minimal and positive impact.

Jens Peder was well known and respected not only in Denmark and Greenland, but also in many other parts of the world. Representing Denmark on the Polar Board of the European Science Foundation, he was elected to the three-member Polar Board Executive, where he worked to

achieve a closer co-operation with other international bodies, such as the Arctic Ocean Sciences Board and the International Arctic Science Committee. His ability to get things done in committees and his strong interest in Greenland extended the Polar Board's work from continental Europe right across the Atlantic.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) and other American scientific organizations, such as NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, have a tradition of strong involvement in research in Greenland, many scientific aspects of which were handled through the Commission for Scientific Research in Greenland. Many American researchers and administrators still cherish the memory of the friendly, cordial, and personal approach of Jens Peder, which added another dimension to the professional and international relationships. He was also instrumental in establishing closer cooperation with Russian Arctic scientists.

Jens Peder encouraged both the NSF and the Polar Board to establish a year-round science program, including an international environmental observatory, at Summit, on the top of the Greenland Ice Sheet. This unique location, 3200 m above sea level, is the highest point north of the Arctic Circle.

The scope of Jens Peder's activity was enormous. In addition to daily work at the hospital, at the Commission, and in all the positions already mentioned, he chaired the Nordic Council for Arctic Medical Research and served on the boards of the International Union for Circumpolar Health and the *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*.

Jens Peder received many expressions of gratitude and honour. At the 10th International Conference of Circumpolar Health in Anchorage, Alaska (1996), he received the Jack Hildes Medal for excellence in Arctic medicine as a token of his colleagues' appreciation, gratitude, and admiration.

Loyalty to work, friends, and family governed the life of this extraordinary scholar and physician: his own well-being was his last priority. A beloved husband and father, he took great pride and joy in being with his family. Jens Peder and Susanne shared 36 years in a truly happy marriage. His love for travel and the Arctic was so contagious that Susanne often traveled with him, and they filled their wonderful home north of Copenhagen with treasures from their many trips.

Already sick, Jens Peder made an extraordinary effort to attend the wedding of his son Jesper in June 1998. It was to be his last major family event. His four children—Jesper, Marianne, Birgitte, and Anne-Louise—remember him as a tender and loving father. The love and devotion of his wife and children remain an inspiration.

His work and his personality will long be remembered, and his wisdom, guidance, and friendship will be sorely missed. His family and the Danish and international scientific communities have lost an extraordinary human being.

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