

Afterword

Grandmaster J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk: The fire and soul of Gerontechnology

Herman Bouma, PhD^a

^aemeritus professor Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, Netherlands;
E: heebouma@xs4all.nl

H.Bouma. Grandmaster J.E.M.H. van Bronswijk: The fire and soul of Gerontechnology. Gerontechnology 2016;15(4):247-248; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.15.4.010.00 How was it that Annelies van Bronswijk - a reputed biologist - became a great contributor to gerontechnology? Her background in brief: as she combined her expertise in mites and allergies with housing technologies, she was caught by the bug of gerontechnology. The demise of the then Institute for Gerontechnology awakened her righteousness and prompted her to create 'Gerontechnology', the scientific journal of the International Society for Gerontechnology, of which she became editor-in-chief. With minimal paid assistance, and maximal personal dedication, she turned the journal into the valued collection of insights it is today. Moreover, her talent for education made her the ideal director of gerontechnology master class. At the 10th international congress in Nice, ISG justly honours her as grandmaster of gerontechnology.

How was it that Annelies van Bronswijk (*Figures 1,2*), - a biologist by training and an expert in mites, insects, and ecosystems - chose to lead 'technology for ageing people' toward one of its enduring accomplishments, i.e. its quarterly journal 'Gerontechnology'? The brief answer is: her broad scientific basis, her firm decisiveness, and her 24/7 dedication. She devoted most of

helped her in her zeal to help solve real-world problems. Later she worked at research stations in the U.S. in Hamilton, Montana; Honolulu, Hawaii; and East-Lansing, Michigan, where she also organized Bachelor and Master degree courses. This period she would later describe as "completing my basic academic education". Her fighting spirit made her choose 'karate' as a defensive sport, which she still actively pursues and which inspired her to visit its place of origin in Okinawa, Japan, to learn more about the background of the sport. The same defiant spirit also explains



Figure 1. Annelies (J.E.M.H.) van Bronswijk in 2012, photographed at the Eindhoven University of Technology (photograph by Rob Stork)

the past 20 years to gerontechnology. Born in Nijmegen, the Netherlands on New Year's eve 1946, in a family skilled in building, she entered the Catholic University of Nijmegen as an inquisitive student in biology since, as she put it: "life and nature seemed her more complex than technology". Her PhD thesis in Nijmegen described indoor environments as ecosystems for mites and insects resulting in allergic diseases¹, and was partly researched at the University of Manitoba, Canada. Defining the best ecosystems for older people was still in a distant future.

Already during her PhD research, she earned professional certificates in teaching, room cleaning, and controlling indoor pest, abilities that



Figure 2. Anneliesje 3 years old, painted portrait by Dorus Arts (1901-1961); a hidden hand of Anneliesje's mother holds her quiet during posing (photograph by Cor Pernot)

her participation in the 4-day 40 km walking festival 'de Vierdaagse' in Nijmegen, a walkathon which many considered impossible for her to complete. Her eating habits similarly challenge established health recommendations: green salads are referred to as 'rabbit feed'.

For about 25 years she researched and taught mite-related disease at the Medical Department of present Utrecht University, building up collaboration with Health Technology research at Eindhoven University of Technology (EUT). Her Utrecht chair was entitled 'Biotic agents in dwelling hygiene', later followed by the Eindhoven chair: 'Biotic agents in the built environment', in 1999 renamed: 'Public Health Engineering for built environments'. December 31, 2011 she retired from EUT, and added the matrilineal genealogy to her research interest.

GERONTECHNOLOGY

Ever attentive to socio-cultural developments such as demographic ageing and increasing multiculturalism, she became involved in the EUT efforts in the field of gerontechnology. When the new Board of Eindhoven University decided to close the Institute for Gerontechnology in 1999, she felt the subject matter was too important to be left to the whims of the Board of the day, and she joined efforts in understanding gerontechnology.

Scientific journal

In 2001 she turned conviction into action by transforming the newsletter into a fully-fledged scientific quarterly journal 'Gerontechnology', the official journal of the International Society for Gerontechnology (ISG). Annelies became the first editor-in-chief. Overcoming financial setbacks, she presented at the 4th International Gerontechnology Conference in Miami in 2002 (organized by Neil Charness and colleagues) the 'Gerontechnology' issue 2(1), consisting of 9 keynote papers and around 110 abstracts, all peer-reviewed.

She assembled an expert editorial board, identified new relevant themes for the lives of older people, attracted sufficient numbers of incoming manuscripts, and ensured there was a relevant front cover for each new issue, taking care of the selection of photographs, including sometimes her own. International ISG conferences in Miami, Nagoya, Pisa, Vancouver, Taipei, Eindhoven, and now Nice were accompanied by special issues that presented all peer-reviewed abstracts. An

update of 'Gerontechnology' was provided at all international ISG-conferences. The status of the journal rose as it was included in indexing, citation, and abstracting services with gradually increasing impact and index scores.

Favourable external scores served to advance what really mattered: relevant content for the daily lives of older people in their own culture and ecosystems and impacted by the ever more intruding technology innovations that are often for the better, sometimes for the worse. The editorials, usually invited or initiated by herself, are a reflection of her concerns and interests in the areas of leisure, self-esteem, and education. She (co)authored several papers herself, including an early one on the concept of matrices to reflect the basic contributions of human- or gerontechnology-oriented and technologically-oriented families of scientific discipline². A full list of her scientific papers is available and not reproduced here³.

Education

Annelies is initiator of the HB Foundation that supports travel for PhD students in gerontechnology. She has an extraordinary talent for directing master classes, which she describes as the 4th pillar of gerontechnology^{4,5}. She challenges PhD students to select and focus on their single most important theme, then to consider the broad spectrum of aspects to be taken into account, and to overcome natural shyness and modesty. Her larger-than-life personality also shines through in the educational arena and demonstrates once again she is a one-off, unique and inimitable.

AWARDS

Her frequent media invitations are a public recognition of her many accomplishments, for which she also received many official awards such as the Dr Karl-Heyer Award (Mönchengladbach 1993), the IG-Nobel Prize (Harvard University 2007), the honorary membership of ISG (Pisa, 2008), and the Netherlands Royal honour as 'Officier in the orde van Oranje Nassau' (Eindhoven, 2012). She became a Gerontechnology Grandmaster in honours of her great service to the International Society of Gerontechnology, in particular as the driving force behind the scientific journal Gerontechnology and the master classes that she directed. The theme that runs through this is her true purpose of scientific understanding: improving the lives of innumerable older people.

References

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