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Interview with Cyril Wecht

(Cyril H. Wecht received his M.D. degree from the University of Pittsburgh, and his J.D. degree from the University of Maryland. He is certified by the American Board of Pathology in anatomic, clinical, and forensic pathology, and is a Fellow of the College of American Pathologists and the American Society of Clinical Pathologists and the National Association of Medical Examiners. Dr. Wecht was formerly the Chairman of the Department of Pathology and President of the Medical Staff at St. Francis Central Hospital in Pittsburgh, and is actively involved as a medical-legal and forensic science consultant, author, and lecturer. He also serves as the elected Coroner of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

Cyril Wecht



He is a Clinical Professor at the University of Pittsburgh Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine, and Graduate School of Public Health; an Adjunct Professor at Duquesne University Schools of Law, Pharmacy, and Health Sciences; a Distinguished Professor at Carlow College; and Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Cyril H. Wecht Institute of Forensic Science and Law at Duquesne University School of Law. He has served as President of the American College of Legal Medicine and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and also as Chairman of both the Board of Trustees of the American Board of Legal Medicine and the American College of Legal Medicine Foundation.

He is the author of more than 475 professional publications; an editorial board member of 18 national and international medical-legal and forensic scientific publications; and editor of 35 books, including a 5 volume set, *FORENSIC SCIENCES* (Matthew Bender), and two 3 volume sets, "*Handling Soft Tissue Injury Cases*" and "*Preparing and Winning Medical Negligence Cases*" (both published by Michie).

Dr. Wecht has organized and conducted Postgraduate Medical-Legal Seminars in more than 50 countries throughout the world in his capacity as Director of the Pittsburgh Institute of Legal Medicine. He has personally performed approximately 15,000 autopsies, and has supervised, reviewed, or been consulted on approximately 35,000 additional post-mortem examinations, including cases in several foreign countries.

Dr Wecht has testified in more than 1,000 civil, criminal, and workers compensation cases in state and federal courts in more than 30 states and several foreign countries.

Dr. Wecht has appeared as a frequent guest on numerous national TV and radio shows, discussing various medico legal and forensic scientific subjects, including medical malpractice; alcohol and drug abuse; assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and Reverend Martin Luther King; death of Elvis Presley; Sheppard case; O.J. Simpson case; JonBenet Ramsey case; Diallo case; Chandra Levy death investigation; and Laci Peterson homicide. These cases, as well as those involving Mary Jo Kopechne, Sunny von Bulow, Jean Harris, Dr. Jeffrey McDonald, the Waco Branch Davidian fire, Vincent Foster, and many others, are discussed from the perspective of Dr. Wecht's own professional involvement in his books, Cause of Death, Grave Secrets, Who Killed JonBenet Ramsey? , and Mortal Evidence.

Dr. Wecht and his wife, Sigrid, have four children, and eleven grandchildren, all of whom reside in Allegheny County. He has received numerous awards and honors from various professional, community, and governmental organizations, including County Detectives' Association of Pennsylvania, Deputy Sheriffs' Association of Pennsylvania, Vectors, New York Society of Forensic Sciences, American College of Legal Medicine, National Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the American Legion. He has been invited as a Distinguished Professor to lecture in several foreign countries, and is an Honorary Life Member of the National Academies of Legal Medicine of France, Spain, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Mexico, Columbia, and Brazil.

Click here to download Dr. Wecht's CV.

Dr. Wecht has lectured at numerous medical, law, and other graduate schools, as well as many colleges and universities, and numerous professional organizations and governmental agencies, including Harvard Law School, Yale Medical School, the FBI Academy, and the Medical Division of the CIA. We as forensic pathologists regard him as an icon of Forensic Medicine. This journal reviewed his book Mortal Evidence: The Forensics behind Nine Shocking Cases (Prometheus Books, 2003) in the current issue of our journal.

We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology" approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over two months. Some excerpts.. ..)

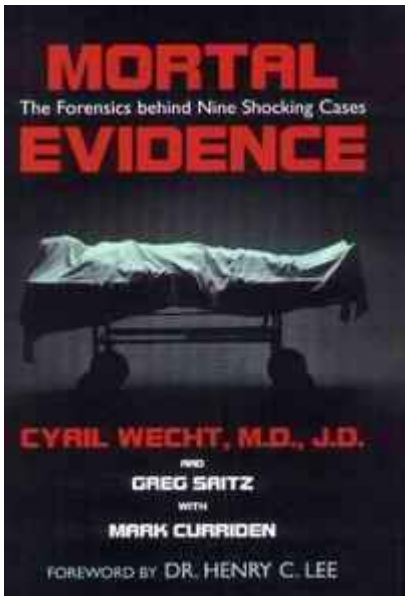
Q. Your favorite authors/books?

A. Churchill

Q. Have you ever traveled to India, or to Indian subcontinent? Would you like to visit, if such an opportunity arose?

A. I haven't. I would like to very much (Two separate planned trips were cancelled due to international conflicts)

Cover Jacket of *Mortal Evidence*, the bestseller by Cyril Wecht (Prometheus Books, 2004). Click cover to go to its review.



Q. Are you interested in Science Fiction? Do you think SF is a good means to teach science to children?

A. Not particularly

Q. Your calling in life?

A. Pursuit of justice.

Q. Your first Award?

A. Elementary school class valedictorian.

Q. First book you read?

A. Tom Sawyer (Mark Twain).

Q. Your greatest inspiration?

A. My parents (immigrants from Europe).

Q. Greatest love of your life?

A. My wife, Sigrid.

Q. You are most sensitive about?

A. Hypocrites and fanatics.

Q. You are passionate about?

A. My family and my profession.

...I can't compromise at all with charlatans and fools...

Q. Any superstitions?

A. Nothing.

Q. With whom can't you compromise at all?

A. Charlatans and fools.

Q. Whom do you hate or don't like at all?

A. Liars and schemers.

Q. What do you look forward to?

A. Seeing my 11 grandchildren grow up.

Q. Your greatest love?

A. My family and my old dear friends.

...If I were given a choice to be marooned on a desert island with someone, I would choose Sophia Loren! Don't ask me why!...

Q. If you were given a choice to be marooned on a desert island with someone, whom would you choose and why?

A. Sophia Loren! Don't ask me why!!

Q. If you could change one thing about my family, what would it be?

A. More children and more grandchildren.

Q. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

A. I would like to have more patience.

Q. If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

A. I would love to see more peace and justice in this world.

Q. What do you think are your biggest assets?

A. A good mind and a sense of humor.

...I would love to see more peace and justice in this world...

Q. Your biggest fear?

A. World terrorism.

Q. Your Birthday?

A. March 20, 1931.

Q. Your current state of mind?

A. Calm, generally content.

Q. Your favorite bedroom line?

A. "are you going to sleep so early?!"

Q. Your favorite food?

A. Northern Italian cuisine.

...My favorite food is Northern Italian cuisine...

Q. Your favorite one-liner?

A. "Let's get serious".

Q. Your favorite possession?

A. Two Italian violins.

Q. Your favorite quote?

A. Several comments by Winston Churchill.

Q. Which has been your favorite journey/holiday?

A. Italy, with my family, 1995.

Q. What is your greatest extravagance?

A. Family holidays at Christmas/New Years.

Q. What is your greatest necessity?

A. Good secretaries and staff.

Q. What is your greatest regret?

A. My parents should have lived longer.

…I feel my biggest strengths are my intelligence and education…

Q. Your Hero?

A. No single person.

Q. What is your idea of perfect happiness?

A. Retirement in 15 years and being with my family.

Q. Your spice?

A. Old Spice.

Q. Your biggest strength?

A. Intelligence and education.

Q. Your wildest fantasy?

A. Inheriting millions from an unknown relative!

…Kindness and consideration touch me most…

Q. Place Of Birth?

A. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Q. The move/case/book that kick started my career?

A. College activities

Q. What touches you most?

A. Kindness and consideration.

Q. When or where were you happiest?

A. With my parents as a child.

Q. Where do you see yourself five years down the line?

A. Doing the same things I'm doing now.

Q. Who or what would I like to born as in my next life?

A. Don't know.

Q. Any message for our readers?

A. Live well and enjoy. God bless you all!

Dr. Wecht can be approached via E-mail at cwecht@county.allegheny.pa.us. The review of his book Mortal Evidence: The Forensics behind Nine Shocking Cases *appears in the same issue. Readers wanting to visit this review may want to the linked page (page008). His extremely impressive CV can be downloaded by clicking here.*

Other useful sites related to Dr. Wecht

1.  Official site of Dr. Cyril Wecht
   (The site is a veritable encyclopedia on Wecht. It gives information about him, his institute, his books, his web journal, the medicolegal services he renders and so on. One can use an online inquiry form on the site to inquire about Dr. Wecht's availability for medical-legal consulting services. One can also try Google News to find news on him.)
2.  Biography Dr. Cyril Wecht
   (The site not only gives an extensive biography of Wecht, including information on several books he has written, but also his exclusive interview with Donald A. Purdy for the *Select Committee on Assassinations* about the single-bullet theory regarding JFK assassination. A must read.)
3.  Another biography Dr. Cyril Wecht (including an audio interview)
   (This is another interesting site, which gives Wecht's biography. The biography that appears here is rather short, but the highlight is that it includes an audio interview. You would need realplayer to listen to the interview though.)

Interview appearing in the previous issue Interviews : Collective Index Interviews in our sister publication : Collective Index