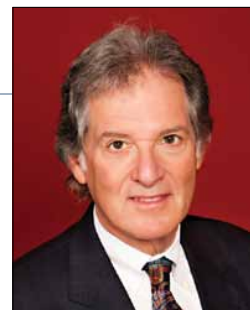


# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Well, the business travel season is in full swing, and I will put in almost half of my annual miles between September and December. Many trips are purely for M&M (miles and money), and others because it seemed like a good idea at the time, but often I go just because it is the right thing to do (the third M—*mensch*—Def: a person of integrity and honor). Thus, my recent trip to Jena. For those of you unfamiliar with this town, it was where, in 1806, Napoleon defeated the Prussians. It sits in the heart of what once was the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and is the train stop after Weimar (as in Republic). Why, you appropriately ask, would someone take two days off from his job to go to such a place? Well, I went to attend a birthday party—it was the 50th anniversary of the synthesis of bendamustine by Ozegowski and Krebs. For the non-hematologists in the audience: bendamustine is a bifunctional alkylating agent that is one of the most active drugs for lymphomas and chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Bendamustine was initially manufactured in a factory described in a recent PBS special as being notorious for producing the oral steroid Turinabol for the German Olympic athletes, resulting in the creation of dozens of disturbed and dysfunctional women. I was instrumental in bringing bendamustine into the US and have done a number of studies with this drug; therefore, when invited by Pr. Michael Herold, I could not refuse. Not only was I the sole US representative, but only one other participant in the event was from outside of Germany (Switzerland).

To get to Jena from Washington, you hop on a plane and fly 9 or so hours to Frankfurt, and then catch a regional train on which you ride for 2 hours 50 minutes. It was quite clear that, while the actual wall is down, the virtual wall remains semi-intact. I took my seat in the first-class car and was followed by a group of rotund men carrying a beer keg with a pump on top, and a set of glass steins. They had a grand time during the trip, passing around sausages and guzzling brew. After that ride, I had 3 minutes to catch the connecting train to Jena. I jumped into a car as the train was pulling away, and found that there were no seats, just a lot of bicycles, backpacks, and student-appearing people. So,

I stood and bounced around for another 15 minutes until I arrived at my destination. Next was a 15-minute taxi ride to the hotel. What could not have been more appropriate was that the route was along Karl Marx Blvd! The old hotel was surrounded by numerous dilapidated student apartment buildings, which were remnants from the Communist era. The décor in my hotel room was a series of 8×10" black and white photographs of US movie stars—I had the Marx Brothers (Groucho, Harpo, Chico, Zeppo, but no Karlo) for company.

For dinner, we were bused to the Zeiss Planetarium, the world's oldest. Following a series of speeches, including one from a scientist involved in the creation of the birthday girl, was a typical East German dinner followed by a show of the heavens. But, no birthday cake!

The symposium the next day brought together many of the German investigators instrumental in the early and more recent clinical trials. Throughout the visit, my hosts were extremely gracious and thoughtful, and were kind enough to provide translators for both the dinner speeches and the symposium presentations. My last night was spent at the Frankfurt Airport Hilton (a surprisingly nice place with a very good restaurant, but . . .), and then I was home the next day. Nevertheless, I wouldn't have missed the occasion. I consider my role in the development of this agent to be one of my most important contributions, given the thousands of patients who have benefited from it.

Between that trip and next month's letter, I will have visited Chicago, Newark, Menton (France), Boston, and New York, with a family wedding in Miami thrown in. Ain't traveling glamorous!

Until next month . . .

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce D. Cheson".

Bruce D. Cheson