



In Print

A PACK OF ... ? A French surgeon has used his knowledge of “wolf children” to help expose the latest fabricated autobiography to rock the publishing world. Misha Defonseca, now living in Massachusetts, had claimed to be a Jewish girl from Belgium who lived with wolves during a part of her journey to Ukraine and back during World War II in a futile search for her deported parents. Published 11 years ago, *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* was turned into a feature film that premiered this year in France.

Her book drew the ire of Serge Aroles, who last year published a book debunking legends of children being raised by wolves. Although it’s theoretically possible that a “pseudo-pregnant” female wolf would nourish a human newborn, Aroles says, a pack would never adopt a child of age 7. And he adds that certain details, such as a female wolf reprimanding Misha for urinating like a male, with one leg raised, were “just ridiculous.” Aroles also discovered that Defonseca, whose real name is Monique De Wael and who was born into a Catholic family, attended school during the years she claimed to have made the trip.

After Aroles published a number of online articles attacking the book and Belgian newspapers started investigating, Defonseca admitted to the hoax in a statement on 29 February. She asked forgiveness but said the story “has been my reality.”

IN MEMORIAM

CLOSURE. Airmen John Lubben, Albert Fogue, and Charles Spiegel disappeared in 1944 after their U.S. fighter plane went down during a bombing mission near Cologne, Germany. Thanks to efforts by forensic scientists, the men’s remains will be buried with honors next month at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

Although the remains were discovered in Germany in 1975 and recognized as American servicemen, nothing suggested the men’s identities. They were buried among nearly 800 unknown soldiers in a Belgium cemetery. Their story surfaced in 2003, when a group of German hobbyists unearthed American plane wreckage near the original location of the remains and notified the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) in Hawaii. Forensic anthropologists at JPAC and scientists at the Department of Defense DNA Registry in Washington, D.C., identified the men by matching their fillings to their dental charts and comparing their DNA to that collected from family members.

JPAC issues about 100 identifications every year, some of them dating back to the American Civil War, and the DNA lab processes more than 800 samples a year to help identify casualties of past and current conflicts. James Canik, deputy director of the lab, says modern molecular methods help solve cases that would have been impossible a decade ago. “When we’re able to go back to [the families] and provide them an answer after so many years, it’s extremely rewarding,” he says.

DEATHS

BRIDGE. When China decided to look West in the late 1970s, hundreds of science

majors clamored to get into Ph.D. programs in the United States—but they had no idea how to enroll, and U.S. universities had no idea how to assess them. Cornell University geneticist Ray Wu played matchmaker, creating the China-United States Biochemistry Examination and Application program, which vouched for students who did not have access to GRE or TOEFL exams.

Last month, Wu, 79, passed away in Ithaca, New York. To honor his memory, the Chinese Biological Investigators Society (CBIS) hopes to create a foundation that will continue his legacy of strengthening ties between Asia and the West.

Chinese biologists speak in awe of Wu, a soft-spoken émigré whose father, Wu Hsien,

is considered the founder of biochemistry in China. Wu came to the United States in the waning days of China’s civil war in 1948 to pursue doctoral studies. He made his own scientific mark in 1970, when he developed the primer-extension approach for determining nucleotide sequences. Frederick Sanger improved on the method and won a Nobel Prize. Later in his career, Wu worked on transgenic rice.

While mourning Wu, leaders of CBIS are drawing up plans for a Ray Wu Fund. One element of the fund will be prizes to outstanding graduate students of any nationality working in Asia. And an October symposium in Ithaca, originally intended to celebrate Wu’s 80th birthday, will now be a memorial event.



<< Two Cultures

THINK ABOUT IT. A statue of an upside-down figure, evocative of flames, is a new reminder of the value—and the price—of free thought. The memorial to Giordano Bruno, who was born 450 years ago, was unveiled on 2 March in Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz station. The statue commemorates the one-time Dominican monk who was burned at the stake in 1600, primarily for denying the divinity of Christ, but also for supporting the Copernican model of the solar system and for his idea that the universe contained a multitude of suns and Earth-like worlds. The sculpture, by Alexander Polzin, is symbolic of the way scientific discoveries and revolutions happen, “by turning a worldview on its head,” says Jürgen Renn of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, which hosted an associated symposium this week on Bruno. The 6-meter-high sculpture is designed to “irritate” passersby into reflecting on the role of human reason in making the world a better place, says Ernst Salcher of the Giordano Bruno Foundation, which helped fund the project.

