



# “YOU ARE ALL MY HEROES”

## A special tribute from Honorary Fellow, Mr Robert (Bob) Gordon

*With more than 50 years' experience in journalism, including 13 years as editor in chief of Gold Coast Publications Pty Ltd (publishers of The Gold Coast Bulletin), Bob Gordon's lifework has been championing the Gold Coast; showcasing the capabilities that this vibrant city has to offer. Bob reflects on his long and remarkable journey alongside the Institute for Glycomics.*

“My introduction to the Institute for Glycomics in 2002 is thanks to the late Terry Robertson. I couldn't believe I had uncovered such a hidden gem right here on my doorstep! The Institute for Glycomics was one of the most remarkable research institutes in the world, housing so much promise, not just for the Gold Coast but for global health.

From humble beginnings, it was evident that the Institute's future was bright. Professor Emeritus Ian O'Connor AC, the Honourable Robert Borbidge AO and the late Terry Robertson invited me to join the Institute's Board of Advice.

*“The story of the Institute for Glycomics was better than any front-page news headline, and it was this introduction so many years ago that fuelled my fire to advocate for the vital research projects being undertaken at the Institute. They had a story to tell; they just needed help to fill the chapters and realise their potential through expansion. I was honoured to be invited to hold a Board of Advice membership, which I eagerly accepted.*

“It was my experiences growing up that set the foundation for my desire to champion, advocate and build community support for medical research.

“I reflect on the major events of times gone past that have created a devastating mark on history, shaping the way in which we view diseases like cancers and infectious diseases; bringing puzzle pieces of the unknown, to the known, developing our understanding of diseases and translating that into ways that we can combat the devastation they can cause, and in some cases eradicate the illness altogether.

“In 1848, the great Polish composer Chopin gave a concert in Edinburgh. He was dying of Tuberculosis (TB) but played magnificently for two hours. Someone of such stature, brilliance and talent - dead just a year later. It's hard to fathom.

“TB spread across Scotland, so my ancestors, the Gordons of time past, decided their youngest son, a law student in Edinburgh should be sent Down Under. There was land aplenty and the climate was thought to be drier and safer. I am pleased to say he lived on at Taio, well into old age.

“Back in Europe, hundreds of thousands died in the TB epidemic...not unlike what COVID has done in 2020. I grew up aware of epidemics, but the great fear of war babies like me, was not of the Germans or the Japanese, but of Polio.

“In the 1950s, while I was in boarding school, Brisbane was hit by a polio epidemic, with another a year or two later and no vaccine existed. We had to stay at school; no sport, no lessons, not even an opportunity to attend chapel for endless rosary prayers.

“Having lost our holidays and a good part of one term in quarantine, we were ordered to our beds for an injection. Salk hadn't yet been invented. Laying face down on our bellies, we awaited our fate in the form of a horse-sized injection needle, delivered by the nurse. I vividly remember looking across at the boy beside me who was much larger than I.

The nurse administered the dose, unscrewed the top, poured more Gamma Globulin and proceeded to inject a second dose. Apparently, the dose was decided on weight and it was then that I was thanking my lucky stars that I was small.

“One of my classmates had died of polio, another spent a few years in an iron lung before he too died, and a third, curiously, recovered and had a growth spurt, making him large enough to play in the first fifteen. He, like my brother, did medicine and became a head surgeon at the Mater Hospital. A year or so later, along came Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin and their vaccines just about wiped out polio across the planet.

“Back in World War II, my great uncle Professor Doug Gordon (later Dean of Medicine in Queensland) served in the army team led by Raphael Cilento who tried to protect our soldiers from the real scourge of tropical diseases up there in Papua New Guinea and Asia.

“Brazil declared conscription after the surrender of Malaysia, but men could choose between going into the jungle to extract rubber for ships, airplanes and machine guns or joining the Brazilian regiment to fight beside the Americans in Italy. Brazil lost 30,000 men, not by the hand of combat but by the contraction of diseases like yellow fever from the jungle.

“History astounds me. It tells a story - important news stories - which is why my career led me into journalism and news publication. This history and the experiences of growing up amidst pandemics and illnesses, seeing the devastation first-hand, has entrenched a burning desire to alleviate future generations from having to experience what I did, and what our ancestors have.

“Scientific discoveries and progress take dedication, passion, focus, collaboration and time, not only by researchers but also a community. A community who will stand up, **dedicated** to promoting the unique approach to these diseases, **passionate** about driving support, **focused** on a future no longer strangled by devastation, **collaborating** with networks to create a bigger community village and **time** spent educating the world on why these researchers need us, so that we can give time back to those who follow in our footsteps.

“I felt thrilled to be asked to stand alongside Professor Mark von Itzstein AO and his research teams to tell their story, champion the Institute and help create opportunity to be the change the world so desperately needs as they tirelessly work to create collateral damage against diseases of global impact. Their successes and progress to date reiterate that potential I saw nearly twenty years ago. The research being carried out right here on the Gold Coast is vital to the future of our health and civilisation.

*“The team at the Institute for Glycomics are the real heroes, I just get to tell their story. I will continue to tell their story as I close the chapter of being a Board of Advice member and turn the page to an Honorary Fellow of the Institute for Glycomics.*

*“This next chapter will be their best yet.”*

