"W"hen come we, what are we, whither go we?" Paul Gauguin used these three questions as the title of one of his paintings that conveyed the search for man’s identity, both in the past and future. As corneal transplant surgeons entering the final decade of the 20th century, we rarely take time to reflect on the past accomplishments of the men and women who have preceded us. Often, their contributions are forgotten or go unrecognized as we are caught up in trying to improve our current techniques and looking to future technology. Where we are in 1991 results directly from the building blocks laid down by our predecessors.

It is important that we periodically take time to put into perspective where we have come from, what we are presently doing, and where we want to be in the future. The purpose of our meeting, "Corneal and Refractive Surgery for the Anterior Segment Surgeon: A Symposium Commemorating Max Fine, MD" was to provide that "special moment" to stop and reflect on our past by remembering the many contributions of Max Fine, MD, and to look at how his work has influenced our current knowledge and techniques.

The organization of this symposium provided me a rare opportunity to call on many of Max’s friends and former students to come together and pay tribute to this special man. Most of the speakers knew Max personally and related poignant stories and memories of their friendship with him. Others explained how his work had strongly influenced their careers in corneal transplantation. All testimonials made it evident that Max Fine was truly a man of great talent.

Some who attended the symposium came not because they were corneal surgeons but simply to relive a chapter in their careers as contemporaries of Max. These feelings were expressed vividly in a letter I received following the meeting. "My only complaint (of the meeting) was that the occasion brought back a flood of memories to the point where I spent an insomniac Friday night at the meeting...thank you again for your diligence and care in providing the outstanding tribute to Max. It will be sweetly remembered by those of us fortunate enough to consider Max a good friend as well as a great teacher."

Others who attended the meeting were just beginning their careers in corneal transplantation and had little feeling of who Max Fine was and how he had influenced the current generation of active corneal surgeons and teachers. Following the symposium, many related to me how much more meaningful the tenets and principles of corneal transplantation were after reliving and sharing these special moments with the speakers.

At the conclusion of the symposium, there was a sense of family and tradition in the air. Although the scientific presentations were excellent, the remembrance of our “roots” was firmly implanted in each attendee. Talk of third and fourth generations of corneal training through Fellowships were enthusiastically discussed and many photographs were taken at the meeting to document this lineage. Truly, a common thread was woven within our “corneal family.”
We thank Richard Abbott, MD, for the enormous effort he expended in creating, fostering, and culminating the Max Fine Symposium. We also thank each contributor who not only attended the symposium at his own expense, but also invested the time and effort to prepare a communication for publication in REFRACTIVE AND CORNEAL SURGERY. Their combined efforts reflect the state of the art in corneal transplantation, and emphasize that RCS serves as the voice not only of refractive surgeons, but as surgeons specializing in penetrating keratoplasty as well.