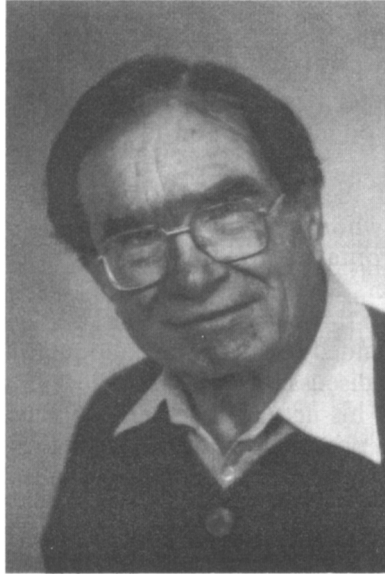


FRITZ BICHSEL
1921-1999



It was on a gloriously sunny autumn day in October 1999 that Fritz Bichsel was laid to rest in a cemetery in a small valley in Switzerland. It was the same valley where he had grown up, and whose features and people had influenced and impressed him in his childhood and youth. It was to this region, of which he said the hills had just the right height, that he returned a year before his death.

He grew up in a family of modest means. After leaving school, he did a commercial apprenticeship. It was only later that he studied mathematics at the University of Berne, where he accomplished his doctoral thesis in 1950. He then worked for some smaller insurance companies before joining Winterthur, Swiss Insurance Company, in 1967. He stayed with that company, where he was Chief Actuary Non-life, until he retired in 1986.

Fritz Bichsel belonged to the founder and pioneer generation of ASTIN. Already the very first volume of the *ASTIN Bulletin* (1960, Vol. I, Part III) contained an article written by him on no-claims discounts in motor liability. With his excellent knowledge of the actuarial theory available at that time, he used the Poisson Gamma model to calculate the no-claims discounts. This model was again to play a central role a few years later. The Swiss supervisory authority insisted upon the insurance companies in Switzerland

to set up a premium system taking into account the individual claims experience of the drivers. They argued that it is not correct to charge the same premium to individuals who produce no or only a few number of claims than to those producing lots of claims. In this connection, Fritz Bichsel wrote his famous paper "Erfahrungstarifizierung in der Motorfahrzeug-Haftpflichtversicherung" (experience rating in motor liability) published in the Bulletin of the Swiss Actuarial Association in 1964. This was the mathematical basis for the introduction of the Swiss Bonus-Malus system in motor liability. This paper has become a classic in the actuarial literature, and if there were a citation index for non-life mathematics, it would certainly rank very high.

At the beginning of the sixties, ASTIN consisted of a small group of enthusiastic actuaries who were thoroughly convinced that mathematics could be employed profitably also in non-life insurance. Only a few of today's ASTIN members actually experienced this time first-hand, but we are all deeply indebted to this pioneering generation. Fritz Bichsel was one of them. He regularly attended the ASTIN colloquia, submitted papers, and actively participated in discussions. He never lost this enthusiasm and love for ASTIN throughout his actuarial career. He was a practitioner and he had to find solutions to practical problems arising in his company. But this was no excuse to him not to work hard to keep himself up-to-date in theory. He closely followed the theoretical development in non-life insurance mathematics and gave impulses to this development by own contributions and by keeping close contacts with researchers. For him theory and practice were never two opposing things. Knowing that best practice is a good theory he always tried to make profit of his theoretical knowledge to find good and lasting solutions for problems in practice. As a mathematician he was a Bayesian. He was convinced that the a priori knowledge available in practice should be taken into account and reflected by the actuarial modelling. So one of his favourite interests as an actuary was credibility theory and experience rating.

Fritz Bichsel was one of those actuaries who succeeded in building a bridge between theory and practice and who put sound theoretical modelling into practical use. But is this not what ASTIN is all about? For me, people like Fritz Bichsel are a shining example for ASTIN and also a challenge to all actuaries working in practice. Everyone who met Fritz Bichsel will remember him as an enthusiastic mathematician and a warm and friendly man.

ALOIS GISLER