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CARL DJERASSI

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Jeffrey L. Sturchio and Arnold Thackray

at

Stanford University

on

31 July 1985

Carl Djerassi

JH

3/15/96

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Oral History Program

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CARL DJERASSI

1923 Born in Vienna, Austria, 29 October

Education

1942 A.B. summa cum laude, chemistry, Kenyon College
1945 Ph.D., organic chemistry, University of Wisconsin

Professional Experience

1942-1943 Junior Research Chemist, Ciba Pharmaceutical Company
1945-1949 Research Chemist, Ciba Pharmaceutical Company
1949-1952 Associate Director of Chemical Research, Syntex S.A.
1952-1954 Associate Professor of Chemistry, Wayne State University
1954-1957 Professor of Chemistry, Wayne State University
1957-1960 Vice President for Research, Syntex S.A.
1959- Professor of Chemistry, Stanford University
1960-1964 Vice President for Research, Syntex Research
1960-1972 Director, Syntex Corporation
1964-1968 Executive Vice President, Syntex Research
1966-1978 Chairman, Board of Governors, Syva Associates
1968-1972 President, Syntex Research
1968-1983 Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Zoecon Corporation
1975- Director, Cetus Corporation
1983- Chairman, Zoecon Corporation
Director, Catalytica, Inc.
Director, Teknowledge, Inc.

Honors

1953 Honorary D.Sc. degree, National University of Mexico
1958 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Kenyon College
1958 Award in Pure Chemistry, American Chemical Society
1959 Leo Hendrik Baekeland Award, North Jersey Section American Chemical Society
1960 Fritschze Award, American Chemical Society
1969 Intra-Science Research Foundation Award
1969 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
1971 Freedman Foundation Patent Award, American Institute of Chemists
1972 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
1973 Award for Creative Invention, American Chemical Society
1973 Madison Marshall Award, Alabama Section, American Chemical Society

1973 Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of Chemists
1973 National Medal of Science
1974 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Wayne State University
1975 Perkin Medal, Society of Chemical Industry
1975 Chemistry Alumni Award for Scientific Achievement, City College of New York
1975 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Columbia University
1977 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Uppsala University
1978 National Inventors Hall of Fame, United States Patent Office
1978 Wolf Prize in Chemistry, Israeli Government
1978 Honorary D.Sc. degree, Coe College
1978 Honorary D.Sc. degree, University of Geneva
1982 Camille and Henry Dreyfus Distinguished Scholar, Duke University
1982 Gregory Pincus Memorial Lecture and Award, Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology
1982 Sixth Annual Exploratorium Award, The Exploratorium Museum
1983 Award in the Chemistry of Contemporary Technological Problems, American Chemical Society
1983 John and Samuel Bard Award in Medicine and Science
1985 Honorary D.Sc. degree, University of Ghent
1985 Honorary D.Sc. degree, University of Manitoba

ABSTRACT

In this interview, Carl Djerassi begins with his early years in Vienna and Bulgaria, including his schooling at the American College in Sofia. This is followed by his immigration to the United States, with special emphasis on his college experiences at Newark Junior College, Tarkio College, and Kenyon College. The central portion of the interview considers Djerassi as a student at the University of Wisconsin, followed by research work at Ciba, a faculty position at Wayne State University, and steroid research at Syntex in Mexico City. The interview continues with a move to Stanford University, and expands on Djerassi's dual positions in business and academe, concluding with personal views on writing scientific and non-scientific literature, interest in the arts, and a number of ways in which chemistry has changed during his career.

INTERVIEWERS

Jeffrey L. Sturchio holds an A.B. in history from Princeton and a Ph.D. in the history and sociology of science from the University of Pennsylvania. He is Acting Director of the Center for History of Chemistry and Adjunct Assistant Professor of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania.

Arnold Thackray majored in the physical sciences before turning to the history of science, receiving a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1966. He has held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is Director of the Center for History of Chemistry and Dean for Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Maryland at College Park. In addition, he is the 1983 recipient of the Dexter Award for outstanding contributions to the history of chemistry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Childhood and Early Education
Parents and family situation in Vienna and Sofia.
Realgymnasium in Vienna. The move to Bulgaria.
Secondary school at The American College in Sofia.
Curriculum. Early interest in medicine. Growing up as
an only child. Skiing accident.
- 7 Immigration to the United States and Undergraduate Education
Arrival in New York. Enrollment at the Newark Junior
College. Decision to become a chemist. Scholarship to
Tarkio College. College activities and the church
lecture circuit. Medical problems and rejection for
military service.
- 13 Ciba and Graduate Education at Wisconsin
Ciba Pharmaceutical Company. Synthesis of Pyrabenamine.
The antihistamine revolution. First graduate courses at
New York University and Brooklyn Polytechnic. Decision
to go to graduate school. Decision to study steroids
with Wilds. Marriage. WARF fellowship to Wisconsin.
Friendship with Gilbert Stork. State of instrumentation
in academic institutions. Estrogen synthesis. The
dieneone-phenol rearrangement. Coining names for
organic reactions. Reasons for not considering Harvard.
Santonin.
- 23 Ciba, Syntex, and Wayne State
Work at Ciba on medicinal compounds. Decision to
return to academe. Offer of research position at
Syntex in Mexico City. Steroid research. Professorship
at Wayne State University. Knee fusion. Divorce and
remarriage.
- 28 Faculty Member at Stanford
Offer from University of Wisconsin. Move to Stanford
University. Leave in Mexico. Reasons for leaving
Mexico. Professional polygamy. Syntex-Stanford
connections. Syva. Zoecon. Cetus. Teknowledge.
- 37 Personal Comments and Philosophy
American organic chemistry. Changing status of natural
product chemistry. Costs of mixing business and
academe. Writing poetry and fiction. Chemistry and
the arts. Changes in chemistry. Reasons for prolific
scientific writing. Students and postdoctoral fellows.
Children. Views on interaction between academe and industry.
- 57 Notes
- 59 Index

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INDEX

Abbott Laboratories	33
Adams, Roger	39
Alza Corporation	34
AI (artificial intelligence)	36
American Chemical Society	37, 38, 53
American Chemical Society Award in Pure Chemistry	29
American College, (Sofia, Bulgaria)	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
American University (Beirut)	4
androgens	20, 23
Anschluss	2
antihistamine	14, 24
Arigoni, Duilio	43
Bader, Alfred	3, 6, 42
Barton, Derek	23, 25
Benadryl	14
Berg, Paul	45
Berkeley	34, 55, 56
Birch, E.J.	20
Birch reduction	20
Birkbeck College (London)	25
Bischler-Napieralski reaction	47
Bloch, Felix	40
Boy Scouts	6
Boyer, Herbert	56
Brauman, John	46
Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute	13, 15, 28
Brown, Herbert C.	27
Buchs, Armand	40, 52
Budzikiewicz, Herbert	52
Cambridge University	52
Carnegie Mellon University	45
Carothers, Wallace	11
Center for Integrated Systems	45
Cetus Corporation	36, 37, 44
Chamberlin, Michael	55
Chemical specialities	25
chiroptical methods	23, 38, 39
Ciba Pharmaceutical Company (Ciba-Geigy)	13, 14, 15, 16, 18,
19, 21, 23, 24, 25,	
26, 28, 31, 51	
City service	36
Cohen, Stanley	56
College de France	43
Columbia University	24, 31
column chromatography	19
Coolidge, Walter	12
Corey, E.J.	38

Cornell University	24, 41
Cornforth, John W.	22
cortisone	26, 27
Council of Scientific Research	52
Cram, Donald	24
Cutter Laboratory	33
de Kruif, Paul	4, 16, 31
desmotroposantonin	22
dienone-phenol rearrangement	20, 21, 22, 23
diosgenin	25
Dreiding, Andre	21
Dobringer, Konrad	26
Du Pont Company	24
Eidgenossische Technische Hochschule (ETH)	26
Eli Lilly & Company	27, 33
Englehard Industries	14
Equilenin	20
estrogens	20, 23, 27
Feigenbaum, Edward	36
Feiser, Louis F.	21, 22, 26, 39
Feiser, Mary	22
Fenselau, Catherine	51
Fishman, Jack	51
Flory, Paul J.	43
Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	34
Fried, Josef	24
Garvan Medal	51
Genetech, Inc.	44
Georgetown University	25, 27
Gordon Conferences	37
Grob, Cyril	46
Gunther, John	11
Hammond, George	24
Harvard University	21, 23, 24, 26, 31,
43	
Hebrew Immigration Services (HIAS)	8
Hershberg, Emanuel	21
Herschel, John	47
Hewlett-Packard Corporation	43, 44
Hitler, Adolf	2, 14, 17
Hoffman, Frances	23, 24
Hoffman-LaRoche, Inc.	25, 51
Hoffman, Roald	41, 43
hormones	20
Huttrer, Charles	13

IBM	44
International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC)	38, 51, 52
infrared spectroscopy	20, 26, 39
Iowa State University	24
Jeger Oskar	23
Johns Hopkins University	12, 18, 51
Johnson, William S.	16, 25, 43, 55
Jones, E.R.H.	20, 26
Jones oxidation	20
Kent State University	15
Kenyon College	10, 12, 17
Klee, Paul	2, 32
Kornberg, Arthur	33
Kutney, Jim	51, 52
Lederberg, Joshua	5, 33, 36
Lehn, Jean-Marie	42
Link, K.P.	19
Little, William	34
Lowell, Robert	12
McElvain, Samuel M.	19, 21
Mailer, Norman	42
Manchester, England	26
mass spectroscopy	
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	24
Maxwell, Robert	53
McConnell, Harden	35
Meier family	14, 15, 17
Merck	24, 26, 27
Merton, Robert	40
Meyer, Rudy	14
Mitchell, Peter	45, 46
Montefiore Medical Center	52
Muetterties, Earl	24
National Institutes of Health (NIH)	27, 54
National Academy of Sciences	31, 33, 45
Near East Educational Foundation	4
New York University	8, 13, 15
Newark Junior College	9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 31
Nobel Prize	22, 33, 40, 45
Northwestern University	16
Norton, Bayes	12
nuclear magnetic resonance	23, 39

Occidental Petroleum	36, 37
Organon	20
Oxford, England	26
Packard, Martin	35
Papa, Dominic	25
Parke-Davis Company	14
Pettit, Robert	52
polarimeter	19, 22
Pyribenzamine	14
Purcell, Edward Mills	40
Queens College	9
Ransom, John Crowe	12
Richter, Burt	36
Rieveschl, George	14
Ritter, John J.	15
Robert College (Istanbul)	4
Robinson, Sir Robert	27, 45
Rockefeller University	5, 51
Roosevelt, Eleanor	10, 11
Rosenkranz, George	26
Rotary Club	11
Roth family	14
Royal Society	52
Rubin, Martin	25, 27
SLAC (Stanford Linear Accelerator Center)	36
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art	2
Sandoz, Inc.	37
Schering Corporation	21, 25
Scholz, C.R.	16
Sheehan, John	24
Sloan-Kettering Institute	26, 51
Sollins, Irving	25, 27
Stanford Industrial Park	33, 35
Stanford University	29, 32, 33, 34, 37,
43, 45, 46, 47, 51,	
52, 55	
Stanford University Medical School	55
steroids	16, 18, 20, 23, 24,
26, 27	
Stork, Gilbert	19, 21, 23, 24, 26,
46	
Syntex Corporation	23, 25-37, 41, 43,
51, 54, 55	
Syntex Institute for Molecular Biology	33, 34, 35
synthesis of:	
biotin	19
morphine	19

progesterone	27
quinine	19
testosterone	27
Synvar (see Syva)	
Syva Company	34, 35
Tarkio College	11, 12, 17
Taube, Henry	43
Teknowledge, Inc.	36, 37
Terman, Frederick	29, 34, 44, 45
ultraviolet spectroscopy	19, 39
United States Army	36, 40
U.S. Department of Commerce	20
University of Basel	46
University of British Columbia	51
University of California, Los Angeles	24
University of Chicago	10, 12, 24
University of Ghent	52
University of Manitoba	52
University of Mexico	28
University of Michigan	20
Univeristy of Wisconsin	17-20, 22, 23, 28, 30
Varian	34, 35
Vandewalle, G.	52
Vietnam War	35
Vitamin B12	49
Washton, Nathan	9
Wayne State University	23, 27-30, 37, 49
Weizmann Institute	51
Whewell, William	47
Wilds, Alfred Lawrence	18-20, 22, 24
Williams, Dudley	52
Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation	16, 26
Woodward, Robert	21, 38, 45, 46, 49
World War I	1, 38
World War II	5, 13
X-ray crystallography	39
Xerox	44
Yale University	12, 31
Zaffaroni, Alejandro	34
Zare, Richard	43
Zderic, John	33

Zoecon

35, 36, 37, 41, 51