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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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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.

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