

SUMMER IN CANADA, 1950

In 1950, I was invited to spend three months of the summer at the Canadian National Research Council, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, working in the laboratory of Dr. Léo Marion. I applied for and received a Special Fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation for the period June 15-September 15, 1950, with a stipend of 175 Canadian dollars per month, plus a family allowance of 100 Canadian dollars per month. This enabled us to drive to Canada and to live in a rented house in the Sandy Hill section of Ottawa. That section of the city turned out to be more plebeian than the name suggested, but the house had the advantage of being convenient to stores and to the NRC on Sussex Drive, about one mile away. The house looked better after our three-month occupancy than before because of our efforts at gardening, grass cutting, and cleaning.

The two-story house had a back (originally servant) stairway as well as front stairs, and I recall that our son, Kenneth, aged two years, dispersed his energy by a seemingly continuous circulation of the two floors. Daughter Marcia, about eight months old, loved to be pushed about in her stroller, was very smiley, and was always enthusiastic in her greetings when I returned from work each day. The parks of Ottawa were at their most beautiful that summer, and the fountains attracted great splashing activity by all the children, including ours. Marcia developed an intestinal problem which we managed to correct in time, but not, however, by following the advice of the doctor who was called in to examine her. His recommended treatment was a small amount of brandy, a remedy he had no doubt been testing regularly on himself. Driving along the parkways was a pastime that delighted all of us, for we could stop and picnic or play at will. We could watch and compare cricket and baseball. Children were even allowed at the horse races. Nell and I were able to renew friendships. We were offered hospitality by Col. Ralph Hendershot, who had been commander of the Canadian forces that had liberated Nell's village in Holland in 1945; by Dr. Henderson of the NRC, who had given me a hitched ride from Hoechst to Minden when I was on my way to visit Nell in Holland for the second time and he was in the Canadian Army Intelligence; and by Dr. Léo Marion and his wife. She was an artist and a collector of art.

When my mother came by train to visit us from her sister's home in Detroit, Nell and I were able to travel to Montreal for our first weekend away from the children. We were unabashed sightseers, and we enjoyed the food for which Montreal is justly famous. The weekend was not as restful as it might have been, however. When we returned to our hotel from dinner and a French film, we prepared for bed. Nell was taking a shower. I suddenly heard the sounds of a fire, which were unmistakable to the chemist's trained ear, and when I raised the shade, I saw that great flames were penetrating the roof of the nightclub directly across the street. I lowered the shade. I suggested to Nell as calmly as I could that the evening was still young, why didn't she put her clothes on again, and why didn't we take a walk. Good sport that she was, she readily agreed. When she emerged from the bathroom, she wondered why there was such a rosy glow outside. It was probably then about 10 o'clock. I raised the shade dramatically so that she could appreciate the source of the glow and, incidentally, some of its warmth. "Oh, yes," she exclaimed, "I think we should take a walk!" Before we did that, we decided to assess the efficiency of the firemen, who had arrived with great clang and clamor and were hooking up hoses and dragging them up the ladders onto the adjacent roofs. It was with some reluctance that we abandoned our vantage position for observing their attempts at extinguishing the blaze, but we decided that part of the hotel might be in jeopardy. We took a long walk through Montreal and returned to the hotel between 1 and 2 a.m., by which time everything appeared under control, but the fire engines were still standing by. It was more restful back in Ottawa.

What about the chemistry? I did isolation, identification, and partial synthesis of lupin alkaloids in the company of very talented and compatible coworkers of Dr. Marion. Drs. Peter Meister from Switzerland and Bryce Douglas from Scotland became our special friends. Both of them, now retired, moved to the United States for positions in pharmaceutical research and administration. I complained now and then to my wife about my slow research progress, probably because I was doing all the work myself without the benefit of students. Accordingly, it must have come as a shock to her when she asked me much later whether I had any publications to show for my time at the CNRC and I replied that there were three. In that moment I lost the privilege of ever complaining about the lack or slowness of research progress. My favorite joint paper was one in which we assigned stereochemical structures of the members of the C_{15} family of lupin alkaloids. Stereochemistry was not Marion's forte, and he was relieved, I think, when the crystal structure determination of one of the members of the series fully confirmed the stereochemical structures that we had proposed that linked all members of the class of C_{15} lupin alkaloids.