

SABBATICAL LEAVE, HOLLAND AND SWITZERLAND, 1953

It had not been the habit of Illinois professors of chemistry to take sabbatical leaves, but Reynold C. (Bob) Fuson and I initiated the process during the academic year 1952-1953. He lectured in Italy, his favorite country in Europe, and he spent considerable time in Florence during the first semester. I received an invitation from the American-Swiss Foundation for Scientific Exchange, Inc., to give a series of lectures in Switzerland, so we sandwiched the Swiss trip between visits to the Netherlands. It was to be Nell's first return to her home country, now as a U.S. citizen and accompanied by three small U.S. citizens: Kenneth (5), Marcia (3) and James (1). We had just moved from 805 W. California to 606 W. Indiana in Urbana; accordingly, I recall the final weeks of the first semester, the move, and the trip to New York as being somewhat hectic. We flew nonstop from New York to Amsterdam on KLM, speeded by a strong west wind.

As we flew over the western coast of the Netherlands, with its estuaries, bays, and islands, we saw that a disaster had occurred. The strong northwest wind, combined with a very high tide, had created a flood condition. The Dutch called it "Het Ramp." Some 2000 people had been drowned, thousands of animals were lost, and all the towns and farms of the low-lying polders were inundated. The arrival was grim, and understandably so. The worst of the flooding had occurred during our innocent trans-Atlantic night flight. For our family, the expectation of a happy, enthusiastic homecoming was replaced with dazedness, which was also the initial mood of the country. Nell's mother met us—her youngest two grandchildren for the first time—and drove us to her house, #203 Noordereinde, in the small, almost linear town of 's Graveland, N.H., near Hilversum, where Nell had been brought up. The large house where the family had lived was now the town hall, but the huge garden and pond remained, along with #203, which had originally been an office for the family business.

Energy had to be conserved to deal with the disaster. Train and bus service was cut back, travel was curtailed, the use of electricity was limited. The Dutch people responded with the gathering of food and clothing, the

hosting of displaced families, and volunteer efforts of all kinds. My old friend, Piet Heertjes, for example, organized the students of the University of Delft to aid in the repair of the dikes that had not been completely destroyed. The Dutch Army was mobilized, and boats and trucks were commandeered. For the adults, the almost-blackouts in the evenings reminded them of wartime. For our children, who used those evenings for long sleeps anyway, we concentrated on the activities of the days, and luckily some of the days during those first three weeks of February were clear. Nell was thrilled to see that Ken and Marcia appreciated the garden which she had known so well, and there were favorite walks along the small canals and through the beech woods, all of which evoked a sense of remembering and belonging. Nell's mother, Mrs. Vermey, hired part-time help to look after James, who responded to the new environment, new formula, and new food, along with the doting ladies, with nothing but smiles from dawn until dark. He thrived. When it came time for Nell and me to go to Switzerland, Holland was at least in recovery and we knew that the children were in caring, family hands.

The day-long rail journey from Amsterdam to Zürich was interrupted at the Basel railroad station long enough for Professor and Mrs. Pl. A. Plattner to meet and treat us to a snack and a brandy as a welcome to Switzerland. The Plattners had spent a summer at the University of Illinois when he was a visiting professor and was teaching a graduate course on terpenes and azulenes. They were very special friends. The Basel railroad station was memorable to us because that was where Nell and I had come together in December of 1938 for a skiing holiday in Parpan and Lenzerheide. Her train from Holland and mine that had originated in England were joined in Basel, just according to schedule. Back to 1953: we climbed back into our rail car to complete the journey to Zürich and the first night in a hotel near the Lake of Zürich.

It was a very exciting time for us. During our three weeks in Switzerland, we made new friends and saw new sights. A good balance was struck between chemistry and sport, between concentration and relaxation, between cities and lakes and mountains. I lectured at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, the University of Zürich, the University of Basel, and the University of Bern. I also gave lectures before the Chemical Societies of those cities. I had prepared four different topics, only one of which did not come up to the quality of the other three. There was an appreciative response, especially to the three lectures I presented with slides. I also visited the Kocher Institute and the laboratories of Ciba, Hoffmann-LaRoche and Sandoz. At each stop, we were received with warm hospitality, and Nell was treated to visits to the homes and sightseeing

and shopping expeditions. We met some of the great chemists who were world leaders at the halfway point of the 20th century, including L. Ruzicka, T. Reichstein, P. Karrer, A. Stoll, and V. Prelog. I was impressed by the younger chemists: Hans Schmid at the University of Zürich and Cyril Grob at the University of Basel, with whom we became good friends. We were introduced to the pleasure and amusement of the Fastnacht festivities in Basel as guests of Dr. and Mrs. Scholz and Dr. Hofmann. We had a most pleasurable, long weekend of skiing in Lenzerheide with Professor and Mrs. Prelog and another skiing weekend, a bit scarier, at the Kleine Scheidegg, as guests of Professor and Mrs. Plattner. The Plattners skied the glacier while we skied the piste. The location of the Kleine Scheidegg just under the 4000 foot north face of the Eiger made my wife from the lowlands very, very quiet.

During our time in Switzerland, Nell was in regular contact with her mother as to the welfare of the children we had left under family care. All had been going well until our final week in Switzerland, by which time we learned that Ken and Marcia had developed colds and then sore throats, but were being treated with sulfa drugs or antibiotics that were supposed to solve the problem. We became anxious but we completed our final week in Lugano, keeping in touch daily. From Lugano we enjoyed tours on foot and by boat in this part of the Tessin, and we relaxed in the early spring that was coming to the Italian part of Switzerland. I started writing my report for Dr. Emil Schlittler of Ciba, U.S.A., who had arranged our trip, and to Dr. C. R. Scholz of Ciba, Basel, who had been our official host as President of the American-Swiss Foundation.

When we returned to Holland via Basel, after a goodbye stop with the Plattners, we learned that Ken and Marcia's fevers had abated but that the doctors were strongly recommending tonsillectomies. This was arranged to be done at the hospital in Hilversum. Although three years is an early age for a tonsillectomy (Marcia), we felt that the doctors were highly competent and convincing in their advice. Ken and Marcia occupied the same room during their recovery, and all the hospital staff, especially those who were competent in English, visited them frequently, as we did, of course. Marcia still remembers that her throat hurt and that she didn't want to drink anything. A recollection of the infant foods she liked caused me to try giving her canned pear juice. That was her first fluid intake, and it solved the incipient problem of dehydration. Full recovery of Ken and Marcia was rapid thereafter. A remarkable overtone occurred much, much later, in 1987, to be exact. I was in the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston following emergency surgery, called a modified Whipple procedure, for an adenocarcinoma blockage of the bile duct. I couldn't be induced to drink

any fluid. Marcia solved the problem by giving me canned pear juice, which lubricated the throat that had been irritated by an array of tubes. When the feeding tube was removed, Marcia advanced me to chilled lobster bisque. Who says that children don't remember what we do for them?

In April of 1953, we took Ken and Marcia on a tour of the Netherlands by car. The tour included the bulb fields, the cheese centers, the churches and old castles, the Afsluitdijk, and the provinces of Groningen and Drente, to which Nell had bicycled for food during the war. It was easy to reach Amsterdam and Hilversum by bus and train. There were numerous opportunities for the children to meet and play with their Dutch cousins in the families of Nell's two sisters, Els and Hilda. The weather was very kind to us during April into May. For the country, that meant the opportunity to pump some of the water away, to recover some of the low-lying polders, towns and fields, and to begin to plan for the massive sea dikes that were finally completed in the 1970s.

I was able to do some library work through the courtesy of Dr. M. G. J. Beets, the director of organic chemical research of Polak and Schwarz Essence Factories in Hilversum, a short bicycle ride from 's Graveland. They were large producers of high grade essences, perfume bases and flavors, 90% of which were for export, and had a good library of chemistry, especially organic chemistry journals. I was also able to visit the Shell Research Laboratories in Amsterdam, where Dr. E. C. Kooyman was my host, and to learn about their research in distillation methodology and electron diffraction. Philips, Roxane in nearby Weesp was undergoing expansion in the field of vitamins, steroids, and pharmaceuticals. They were very generous in telling me about their research, production and plans for the future. At the University of Amsterdam, Professor Wibaut had re-established his research, aided by Dr. Beyerman, while Dr. Sixma, as a lecturer, was introducing a modern approach in tracer studies of organic reaction mechanisms. The graduate students in organic chemistry at the University of Groningen, under Professor Backer, seemed to be exceptionally well trained. In 1972 I was to have the honor of being the Backer Lecturer at that institution. Organic chemistry was in disarray in 1953 at the University of Utrecht. My good friend, Piet Heertjes, was back at his post as Professor of Chemical Engineering at the University of Delft. He and his students had been assisting in the repair of the dikes in the earlier months of 1953, following the great flood. I was to see him again when he was a Visiting Professor at Purdue University and when we were again in Europe on sabbatical leave in 1960. Nell, the children, and I were back in Urbana, Illinois, during part of May and all of June.

At the end of June, we were on the road again, quite literally, driving to Los Angeles along old Route 66. The trip was not without adventure because of the heat. However, we discovered that if we started each day before dawn and stopped driving in mid-afternoon to cool off in a motel swimming pool, the journey became manageable and even pleasurable. As we drove further west, we resorted less to reading and games to keep the older two children occupied, and they began to appreciate the new and wonderful sights. We settled in a summer rental house in Santa Monica just a block or so from the beach. It became very comfortable once we had it fumigated to remove the hungry fleas that had been left by the animals of the owner. A supermarket was close at hand, actually a novel establishment for midwesterners in 1953. We connected with old high school friends of mine who had settled in southern California, and Nell made friends with neighbors who had small children. The large front yard was the children's playground.

Our purpose for being in California was for me to fill my role as a visiting professor at U.C.L.A. I taught a course in organic chemistry for undergraduate premedical students. They were mainly students from other universities who were trying to complete one of the required courses in a minimum amount of time. Pacing a course in organic chemistry for six-week coverage is difficult. There is so much material that cannot be digested upon immediate acquaintance. However, it was a good experience. I tried to maintain enthusiasm. The students simply wanted the course out of the way. Paul Bartlett of Harvard had been the visitor during the previous summer, and there was some pointed discussion about his high grades being C's. I managed a broader curve, but I felt that the student quality was below that at the University of Illinois. I was also in charge of the graduate seminar course, which meant inviting lecturers from U.C.L.A. and neighboring schools, as well as myself, to participate. Despite the excellent chemistry that was described, I felt the tug of the beach, the children, and the Pacific Ocean each afternoon, and I went home early whenever I could. My memories of the summer are mixed: university and beach. On the professional side, I benefitted greatly from regular lunches with Saul Winstein, William Young, Francis Blacet, and occasionally Donald Cram. U.C.L.A. was an active place intellectually. Hypotheses and experiments were examined critically, and recent publications were discussed hypercritically.

When it came time to leave Los Angeles at the end of the summer semester, we drove home by way of Las Vegas and the Hoover Dam, Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, the Colorado Rockies, and the Great Plains. The children's interest, patience and agreeableness were most gratifying. We celebrated son Jim's birthday en route.