



Obituary

Robert S. Shallenberger (11.4.26–28.12.08)



Robert Shallenberger, previously Chief Regional Editor (North America) of “Food Chemistry”, died on December 28th, 2008, after a long illness.

Bob Shallenberger was born in Swissvale, Pennsylvania and had all his early education in public schools in that district. In 1943 he enlisted in the US navy whilst still a ‘junior’, so he had to return to complete graduation after the war. Bob’s military career was spent in small warships in the Pacific and he often recounted (to me) his successes in navigation to remote islands. After the war, he spent a period with the US coastguard before returning to education. He obtained his BS degree and his PhD degree at Cornell University and then secured a post as Research Chemist at the General Foods Research Center, Hoboken, NJ. Then he joined the Geneva Agricultural Research Station (Cornell University) as an Assistant Professor in 1956.

Bob Shallenberger’s work at Geneva (which involved teaching carbohydrate chemistry courses at the main Cornell campus at Ithaca) was highly productive. He helped to train many students in his research field, including Terry Acree and Cy Lee, who still work at

Geneva and who distinguished themselves in his footsteps. Bob produced over 130 research papers in leading journals, but his most famous paper “Molecular Theory of Sweet Taste” (Shallenberger & Acree, 1967) paved the way for taste chemistry research for the following 40 years and this is possibly the most cited paper in the entire field of taste chemistry.

I first met Bob Shallenberger at a symposium on sweetness and sweeteners, 1971, and this was followed by many happy years of research collaboration and friendship, including inter-laboratory visits between Geneva, the National College of Food Technology, Weybridge and the University of Reading. Many students and post-doctoral fellows benefited from these visits and I was privileged to work with him, myself, for a short research period and both he and Carol Shallenberger were generous and hospitable toward my family.

I also remember many happy visits to the American Legion (where Bob was a prominent member) and viewing his artistic work, making animal models. He also constructed various Euclidean models that were at the centre of his thinking about sugar

asymmetry in relation to taste, and bipartite hydrogen bonding as the basis of sweet taste stimulation (AH, B theory). Bob was always firmly of the opinion that science was equally as able to stimulate aesthetic appreciation of the world as the arts. Even after his retirement as Emeritus Professor at Geneva, and his retirement from the Chief Regional Editorship (N. America) of "Food Chemistry", he continued to collaborate and encourage our work in Europe.

I was privileged to collaborate with Bob Shallenberger on a book, about sugar chemistry (Shallenberger & Birch, 1975). He then decided to write another one himself on advanced sugar chemistry (Shallenberger, 1983) and yet a third, on taste chemistry (Shallenberger, 1993). With both of these latter solo efforts he told me that he "just sat down one day and it all tumbled out".

The last time that I saw Bob Shallenberger personally was at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts (about 12 years ago). He was already in failing health but bravely travelled there with Carol to meet me and Kathleen. He continued to battle positively and with great fortitude against his illness, and I was able to keep

in touch with and, indeed, spoke to him twice by telephone only days before his passing.

Bob Shallenberger was a close and kind friend, as well as a highly imaginative and gifted scientist. My wife and I, and many students and colleagues at Reading and in Europe hold him in great respect and will miss him profoundly. He leaves his wife, Carol, children, Rich, Paul, Susan and Eve and two grandchildren.

Gordon Birch
Managing Editor

References

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