

AN INTRODUCTION AND A CELEBRATION

This volume serves a triple purpose. It represents the proceedings of the *Twenty-Fifth International Symposium on Advances in Chromatography* held August 29–September 1, 1988, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and celebrates the Silver Jubilee of this symposium series. But it *also* celebrates the sixty-fifth birthday of Albert Zlatkis, Professor at the University of Houston, the founder of these symposia and the driving force behind each and every symposium since 1963. The speakers at the Minneapolis Symposium were aware of this forthcoming anniversary and contributed their papers with all three goals in mind.

Albert Zlatkis was born on March 27, 1924, in the Polish–Ukrainian–Russian plains, immigrating to Canada with his parents at the age of three, as a late-coming member of the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free”¹. He spent the next 21 years in Toronto, where he studied chemical engineering and received his B.A.Sc. and M.A.Sc. degrees. Accepting a fellowship to Wayne State University, in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., he continued his studies, which led to his Ph.D. degree in 1952. He then went to Shell Oil Company, in Houston, Texas. It is well known that the worldwide Shell laboratories pioneered in the adaptation and further development of gas–liquid chromatography, immediately after the publication by James and Martin², and the Houston laboratory was part of these activities. In this way Al became involved in gas chromatography as early as 1954, a field he remained faithful to for his whole professional life.

At that time the University of Houston was a small school, with most of the teaching being done on a part-time basis by chemists and engineers associated with Houston industrial companies. Al was one of them. He liked teaching so much that when, in August 1955, he was offered a full-time assistant professorship at the University, he accepted it; this was one of the most important decisions in his life. He has been associated with this school ever since. From Shell he took with him his newly acquired knowledge in gas chromatography and immediately utilized it in trying to solve separation problems which, until then, seemed to be insolvable, such as the separation of enantiomers and close-boiling isomers. He also participated in the early gas chromatography symposia, building up contact with the leaders in the field, both in the U.S.A. and in Europe.

On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, Dr. Zlatkis’ professional career and achievements were discussed in detail in an Editorial³, and I do not want to repeat them here. In the past five years his activities have mainly centered on the possibilities of ultra-trace analyses by gas chromatography. He has also collected two important awards to add to those already listed in my Editorial: he was named by the Texas Academy of Science as the Distinguished Texas Scientist for 1985; and, in 1988, he received the Southwest Regional Award of the American Chemical Society.

Albert Zlatkis is one of the best-known American chromatographers and thus, he really does not have to be introduced. How shall I describe him? Probably his most important characteristics are an openness and friendliness toward everybody, regardless of origin, social level, or knowledge; a faith in the goodwill of the members of the human race; a sixth sense in realizing what is important; and an immense energy and activity to carry out any task he considers worthwhile. He is a devoted family man who is lonely if only for one day he has to miss his wife or children. He believes in the

American dream that people can succeed if they are given the chance to do so. Therefore, he will help everybody who asks him; in fact, he will try to help even when he is not asked! But for Al, “helping” means to place somebody on a track: from then on it is up to the individual to achieve.

Today, the word “friend” is often misused, referring to everybody one knows, even if only casually. For Al, this word still retains its original meaning, referring to a person one is attached to by esteem, respect and affection, a person one can trust. Probably, because he values its true meaning, Al has many friends; also, there are many people who cherish the opportunity to call him their friend.

I will never forget my first meeting with Al. After immigrating to the U.S.A., I joined Perkin-Elmer at the beginning of October 1958. A few weeks later, suddenly a smiling person, as yet unknown to me, burst into our laboratory to greet my colleagues with whom he just published a paper on the separation of the three xylene isomers by using benzyldiphenyl as the liquid phase⁴. I still had some of the reserved, more-or-less formal European manners and was astonished by his ability to dominate a place within seconds, in a completely informal way. I visited him in Houston about 10 months later, on the occasion of a meeting of the Gulf Coast Spectroscopic Group, when I also had the opportunity to be introduced to his wife, Esther. We have been in close contact ever since, a friendship I treasure very much.

It is said that at 65, people start to slow down. Frankly, I personally disagree with this philosophy, and I know that Al does too. Thus, we can surely expect many surprises from him in the years to come: what they will be, even I do not know. However, I am sure that they will be just as interesting and exciting as all the other endeavours in which Al has been involved, and I am certainly looking forward to participating in them.

On the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday, I would like to convey to Al the best wishes of all those chromatographers who, in the past 25 years, participated in the symposia organized by him. We wish him many more productive years and a continuing enjoyment in our joint hobby: chromatography. And last but not least, I would like to thank Al personally for all the opportunities he gave me in our many joint projects over the past 30 years. I believe that what we did was useful and contributed to the evolution of the field in which we were active. It was a most rewarding and exciting experience —and, what is probably the most important: it was great fun.

Happy birthday Al!



LESLIE S. ETTRE

- 1 From *The New Colossus*, the poem by Emma Lazarus, which is engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, in New York harbor.
- 2 A. T. James and A. J. P. Martin, *Biochem. J.*, 50 (1952) 679.
- 3 L. S. Ettre, *Chromatographia*, 18 (1984) 233.
- 4 A. Zlatkis, L. O'Brien and P. R. Scholly, *Nature (London)*, 181 (1958) 1794.