

## Editorial

### Goodbye to an Old Friend

It seems to be one of the signposts of growing older that the obituaries are read with more attention. My friends of similar age remark that they do so as well, first to see if they spot someone they knew and second to measure the life experiences of the deceased against what you expect the writers to compose for you someday. So it may be that many of our younger readers did not note the passing of Professor Robert Morrison, 91, on April 25th, who taught at NYU for 20 years but is better known to many of my contemporaries as the coauthor of the seminal organic chemistry textbook titled simply *Organic Chemistry*. We never used this title when we were undergrads but always referred to the book as Morrison and Boyd. This text underwent six editions, sold over two million copies, making it one of the top selling textbooks ever on any subject, let alone in the field of chemistry. Further accolades came in 2001 when the American Chemical Society ranked it among 24 of the 'Greatest Books of Chemistry' for its groundbreaking approach to teaching organic chemistry that emphasized comprehension over rote memorization, a radical pedagogical move at the time when the first edition appeared. Clearly this textbook was widely recognized as important, but why was this particular textbook special to so many of us young scientists?

I attribute Morrison and Boyd's 3rd edition of this textbook for wielding the strongest influence upon the early direction of my scientific career. I entered the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University in 1972 as a chemistry major but with the idea of transferring to the pharmacy school after two years. However, my sophomore year curriculum included Intro Organic Chemistry, and I went to the bookstore for the text required by Professors Wiseman and Zavitsas. While standing in line to pay for this mustard-yellow book, I hefted the volume

and surmised that all that was known on organic chemistry must certainly be between these covers! I've become slightly more worldly regarding the volume of published chemistry since then, but Morrison and Boyd's conversational style, clear schemes, humorous asides, and their emphasis on mechanistic understanding produced a book that I not only could understand but also enjoyed reading. Almost without effort, I found myself remembering reactions on the basis of electronic and steric factors. The effect on me of this remarkable book magnified by my excellent teachers was singularly overwhelming. Enthralled by the art inherent in the design of syntheses of organic molecules, I soon forgot about becoming a pharmacist and stayed in chemistry. Perhaps the refusal of the School of Pharmacy to accept my LIU scholarship had some bearing on this decision, but clearly the influence of Professors Morrison and Boyd in my life is profound. I find others who used this book in the 1970s share these feelings.

I wish I could personally thank Robert Morrison and Robert Boyd for what they unknowingly contributed to the life of this chemist. Reading through reviews of their book on Amazon.com, I note that my experience was not unique; many attribute this book to showing them that organic chemistry could be understandable, if not enjoyable. Sadly, both scientists have now passed on, but remarkably, I still find this 37-year-old book useful, and it retains a prominent spot on my bookcase. Perhaps that is the recognition Morrison and Boyd would have found most satisfying after all.

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