

Saturday, September 13, 2014
Sterling Chemistry Laboratory
Yale University

Hanzelmann



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The Yale Chemistry Department with support from the Dreyfus Foundation and Elsevier publishers will be hosting a symposium in memory of Harry Wasserman on Saturday, September 13, at Yale's Sterling Chemistry Laboratory. The morning will feature an informal get-together of former members of the Wasserman research group organized by Professor Bruce Lipshutz (lipshutz@chem.ucsb.edu). The formal program will begin at 1 pm and conclude about 6 pm.

Here is the current version of the afternoon program:

- 1:00 Scott Miller (Chair, Yale Chemistry)
Welcome

- 1:10 Bruce Lipshutz (Chemistry-UCSB)
Preserving Our Environment via Green Organic Chemistry

- 1:55 Brian Stoltz (Chemistry-Caltech)
Complex Natural Products as a Driving Force for Discovery in Organic Chemistry

- 2:40 John Wood (Chemistry-Baylor)
Recent Efforts in the Synthesis of Complex Natural Products

- 3:25 Coffee Break

- 3:55 Steven Wasserman (Biology-UCSD, Harry's son)
A Toll of Two Species: Signaling and Specificity in Innate Immunity

- 4:40 Short Presentations about Harry Wasserman, chemist, mentor, teacher, raconteur, humorist, editor, artist, musician, advisor, family man.

- 6:00 Close of public symposium

Note that Wasserman friends with limited interest in current chemistry may join the program at the coffee break, or even just for the final series of short presentations about Harry. Accompanying persons would find a lot of exciting new (and old) things to see on the Yale campus, including two really world-class art museums (one ranked 15th world-wide by the *Times* of London), the Beinecke Rare Book Library, and the Sterling Memorial Library, whose reopening after thorough restoration was announced on August 25.

We in the Yale Chemistry Department hope you can join us in honoring Harry and sharing reminiscences with Elga, the Wasserman family, and each other.

If you need further information, please contact one of us or Pat Brodka (203-432-3912 (patricia.brodka@yale.edu)).

Whether or not you can attend, we would be glad to facilitate sharing photos, stories, or sayings relating to Harry and his research group. We hope to prepare a display, a handout, and/or a website incorporating what you share with us. See some examples at the end of this message. Please send your contributions to j.mcbride@yale.edu, or mail to the address below.

Best wishes. We hope to see you on September 13th.

Mike McBride and Fred Ziegler

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Harry loved **sayings**, especially in exotic languages, like this Hungarian one that he learned from his father-in-law

“Péⁿz beszél; kutya ugat” (Money talks; dog barks)

or this one learned from an Italian host urging him to eat immediately, when Harry’s dish had been delivered first:

“Respect the food.”

He liked to tell **stories**. Here is one relating to his classmate in graduate school:

During his thesis defense Louis Fieser asked Martin Edlinger to list the various reagents that could be used to reduce a ketone to an alcohol.

Edlinger rattled off a list of a wide variety of reagents, but when he was finished Fieser asked, “What about catalytic hydrogenation?”

“I thought you knew about that one,” Edlinger replied.

Frank Precopio (Harry’s first Ph.D. student) shared this account:

In Sept. 1948, I reported to Sterling as a first year grad student. It was a beautiful day and a bunch of grad students were playing touch football on the field behind Sterling. I joined them and was carrying the ball when a member of the opposing team hit me hard and I landed on my butt. He apologized profusely but I assured him that I was O.K., we shook hands and he said his name was Harry. I said my name was Frank and we resumed play.

In those days, first year grad students were assigned bench space in a central lab on the second floor, which we called the bullpen. The periphery was occupied by staff and some advanced grad students. The day after the touch football game, I was walking down the hall and saw Harry, who I thought was another first year grad student, sitting at a desk in one of the side labs. I went in and asked him what he was doing there. He sheepishly told me that he had just been hired as an instructor. In the course of the year, we became quite good friends, and from time to time he would tell me about his research. I was intrigued.

At the end of the year when we were choosing our mentors, I had a problem. Paul Cross who was head of the chem department at Brown had recommended me to Arthur Hill, who was dept. head at Yale at that time, and it was tacitly

assumed that I would work for him. With great trepidation, I went to see Dr. Hill and told him I would like to work for Harry. To my great relief, he said “Frank, that’s a great idea. Dr. Wasserman is a brilliant chemist and he is going to have a fine career at Yale.” Several of my fellow students said I was crazy, “He is only an instructor and may not be here in a year or two and you will be left high and dry.” Of course they were very wrong.

Photos from Frank Precopio:



Harry with Danny at a group cook-out (1952), at about 30 and at his 85th birthday party (2006):

