



## Review

Stan Kirschner—An appreciation<sup>☆</sup>A.B.P. Lever<sup>a</sup>, Chris Orvig<sup>b,\*</sup>, Jan Reedijk<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Chemistry, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada<sup>b</sup> Medicinal Inorganic Chemistry Group, Department of Chemistry, University of British Columbia, 2036 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1, Canada<sup>c</sup> Leiden Institute of Chemistry, Leiden University, P.O. Box 9502, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands

## Contents

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It is most unlikely that any reader of this journal, greater than age 35, did not meet Stanley Kirschner at an ICCC, and all will remember him with deep respect and fondness. Stan attended every ICCC from 1959 to 2002, 31 in a row. At 16 of these meetings he was the Permanent Secretary of the ICCC, presiding at the opening ceremony over a 23 year period. He welcomed delegates in the official language(s) of the country, as well as chairing the national delegates meeting (known since 1978 as the Planning Committee). Stan had proudly agreed to be a co-organizer in 2004 when the ICCC was held in Merida, Mexico, but his health prevented him from attending. In recent years his health declined, with heart and kidney problems, and he died at home, on July 16, 2008, surrounded by his beloved wife Esther (Fig. 1), his daughter, Susan, his son Daniel, his daughter-in-law, Zehra, and his granddaughter, Leyla.

The ICCC, the longest running and most storied international conference in inorganic chemistry, was first held in the UK in 1950, roughly concurrent with the 20th century renaissance of the field, and it has carried on since then, rotated around the world on six continents (Fig. 2). In fact it was Stan who had the foresight to make this conference really international by engaging potential organizers in

many new locations. Most importantly, he managed to broaden the ICCC attendance base, and the conference locales, to Iron Curtain countries during the Cold War. He was far ahead of his time, inclusive and international in an era beset with xenophobia and suspicion.

Stanley Kirschner was born in 1927 in Brooklyn, New York, and educated at Stuyvesant High School, a science high school in NY. He subsequently enlisted in the Navy (1944–1945) and underwent naval air force training; however, he had become hooked on chemistry through his father who was a pharmacist and who brought home a small chemistry set when Stan was 11 years old. He thus left the Navy for Brooklyn College from which he received his B.S. in 1950. It was also there where he met his wife-to-be, Esther.

After a brief stint in industry with the Monsanto Chemical Co., Stan completed his A.M. at Harvard in 1952. While a teaching fellow at Harvard, he won an award as best teaching fellow in the department, demonstrating his love for, and excellence as, a teacher early on in his career. Becoming interested in the newly revived field of inorganic chemistry (and particularly coordination chemistry), he was advised by Eugene Rochow and Leonard Nash at Harvard to head west for his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in Urbana, where he graduated in 1954 under the tutelage of John C. Bailar, Jr. It was Prof. Bailar (see the *Coord. Chem. Rev.* interview of Bailar [1]) who introduced Stan (and Stan's classmates such as Daryle Busch) to conferences (Fig. 3). Bailar once packed his car full of his graduate students and drove them from Urbana to Indiana University in Bloomington to a conference on coordination chemistry, where Stan met Prof. Harry Irving for the first time. In 1954, Stan joined the

<sup>☆</sup> Stanley Kirschner, born on December 17, 1927, Brooklyn, NY, USA. Died on July 16, 2008, Detroit, MI, USA. Permanent Secretary, International Conferences on Coordination Chemistry (ICCC), 1966–1989. Permanent Secretary Emeritus ICCC, 1989–2008. Professor of Chemistry (Emeritus), Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202, USA.

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Fig. 1. Stanley and Esther Kirschner in 1979.

faculty of Wayne State University in Detroit, and in 1960 he became full professor; he “retired” in 1992 as Professor Emeritus.

Stan won the Heyrovsky Medal of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science in 1978, and the Catalyst Award for Teaching Excellence from the Chemical Manufacturers’ Association in 1984. He received both the American Chemical Society Henry Hill Award and the Engineering Society of Detroit Gold Award in 1995. He was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Stan’s one hundred scientific papers dealt with the stereochemistry of coordination compounds, the Pfeiffer effect, and the anticancer activity of Pt complexes (before Barnett Rosenberg’s discovery of cisplatin). He was also very interested in chemical education, obtaining a large grant in 1986 for enhancement of the chemistry and teaching skills of middle school teachers. Stan edited three books on inorganic and coordination chemistry.

Stan’s cosmopolitan nature led him not only to attend early ICCCs, but also to periods as visiting professor, such as in the 1960s at University College in London, as a Fulbright and NSF scholar, where one author (ABPL) of this article first met him. At this time (1963–1964) he worked with Professor Ronald Nyholm, a towering figure in inorganic chemistry, who played a major role in the lives of the Kirschners. After receiving the Wayne State University President’s award for excellence in teaching in 1969, Stan went to the University of São Paulo in Brazil as a Ford Foundation visiting scholar. In Brazil, he gave his first lecture in Berlitz-acquired Portuguese, upon arriving, to an advanced group of graduate students on the stereochemistry of coordination compounds. In the 1970s he sojourned at the Centrul de Chimie in Timisoara, Roma-



Fig. 2. Stanley Kirschner in the front row at the 1968 ICCC in Haifa together with the Conference Chair, Michael Cais.



Fig. 3. Stanley Kirschner and John Bailar at the 1976 ICCC in Hamburg.



Fig. 4. Stan Kirschner obviously enjoying himself trying to play the Alp Horn at the Lausanne ICCC in 1992; he had a lifelong love of brass music and was quite an accomplished trumpet player.

nia, the University of Florence, Tohoku University (as a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science visiting professor), and the Institutul de Chimie in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Stan’s strong Portuguese connections took him to the Technical University of Lisbon and the University of Porto in the 1980s with awards from the Fulbright



Fig. 5. Stanley Kirschner retiring as Permanent Secretary of the ICCC and handing over the job to Jan Reedijk (Australia, 1989).



**Fig. 6.** Stanley Kirschner surrounded by previous ICCO organisers, at the jubilee ICCO in 2000 in Edinburgh. In the first row are (from left to right): Laszlo Simandi, Mihali T. Beck, Stanley Kirschner, Hitoshi Ohtaki, Eugenia Spodine, Joao de Oliveira Cabral and David Banerjee; in the second row are: Xiao-Zeng You, Maurizio Peruzzini, Chris Orvig, Egon Uhlig and Jan Reedijk; in the back row are Peter Sadler (organiser), Ivano Bertini, Helmut Sigel and Peter Tasker (organiser).

and Gulbenkian foundations. Stan not only went for the science, but also for the cultures and the languages—he learned to speak many languages and some of them quite well. Stan received honorary membership in national science societies of Russia, India, Brazil and Chile as well as honorary memberships in Portugal and Japan.

Stan and John Bailar attended the 1959 5th ICCO in London and invited the conference to “come to America” in Detroit in 1961;

thus began Stan's long, distinguished and nurturing involvement with the ICCO. Unable to extract funding for airfares for some of his 1961 ICCO distinguished invited speakers, such as Frank Dwyer from Australia, Stan organized military air transport which led to several eminent foreign chemists being commissioned in the U.S. Air Force in order to be flown from their home countries to Detroit. Because of the Cold War, Stan worked hard to acquire a visa to invite K.B. Yatsimirskii from the Soviet Union, making numerous phone calls to the US State Department and finally connecting with the Oval Office of President Kennedy himself . . . Stan got the visa in a couple of hours.

Stan and John, with the support of other influential chemists such as Fred Basolo and Al Cotton, assembled what amounted to the beginnings of an informal organizing committee, namely, a committee consisting of at least one senior representative from every nation in attendance at the Detroit ICCO—this led to the continuing ICCO tradition of the Planning Committee and, ultimately, to Prof. G. Schwarzenbach suggesting Stan as the Permanent Secretary in 1966, a position he held with relish for 23 years (Figs. 4–6).

In 1996 Stan was interviewed by one of us (ABPL); we refer readers to that very worthwhile interview [2] for further detail, for example concerning the visa for Yatsimirskii. In England, Stan adopted the philosophy, from Prof. Christopher Ingold, that the most important thing for a chemist (or any other scientist or professional) to do in his or her lifetime is to be sure to leave the profession in a better state than he or she found it. Stan can rest easily knowing that he did this via many instruments, but the ICCO will forever be a bright star in his legacy.

## References

- [1] A.B.P. Lever, *Coord. Chem. Rev.* 106 (1990) 1.
- [2] A.B.P. Lever, *Coord. Chem. Rev.* 175 (1998) 1.