

Preface to the Special Issue of HETEROCYCLES

in Honour of

Dr. Arnold Brossi

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It is well known that Arnold Brossi is one of the most generous and hospitable chemists in the World. This is shown particularly in his hosting of seminars which have been held in Laax, Switzerland since 1980 every other year in September, so that now there have been seven of these Laaxer (as he calls them) Chemistry Conferences. They are most unusual in that they take place in a Swiss chalet consisting of three apartments. The name of the house, since all respectable houses in Switzerland have names, is Casa Fargliuns. It is actually in Laax Murschetg, in Graubünden, Switzerland. Another unusual feature of the conferences is that there are many repeating speakers. It is almost impossible to avoid inviting the same speakers to return, because they have been so happy with the surroundings, with the company, and with the material that is covered each second year. All I can say is that, from the USA, the east and west coasts and the midwest have been represented and the following countries have been represented: Switzerland, France, Japan, Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). Because the same speakers wish to return, they must struggle, of course, to produce something within the two-year period that is worthy of presentation to a very critical and interested audience. The speeches of the day have usually taken place in the morning. In some cases when there was rain, which was not so unusual for September in Switzerland, there were also speeches in the afternoon. There were long hikes in the afternoon in both rain and sunshine. In the afternoons we also visited chemical plants in Buchs and Lugano. We hiked or rode to lakes and reservoirs, we walked up mountains and saw canyons and other geological wonders, we visited the capital of Graubünden, which is Chur, and a number of villages, including one, Vargis, which is unoccupied in the winter. We also visited churches, cloisters, town markets, and flower shows. We rode on cable cars and chair lifts. We had the most wonderful meals

served in the most wonderful surroundings, either in Casa Fargliuns or in favored restaurants that had been checked out. This means that Arnold Brossi knew the proprietor, knew the chef, and had discussed the meal to be served well in advance of the celebration of the evening.

Let me describe where some of the lunches have been served. One was in the Duchy of Liechtenstein and a few have been in Lugano, but the lunches were merely encouragements to do something energetic in the afternoon because one needed to walk off or "think off" some of the great food that had been taken in. Some of the dinners were cooked by Hanni Brossi, dinners that included Swiss specialities. In the early conferences there were a few cooperative dinners cooked by spouses who were attending the conferences, but it was hard to keep up with the Swiss cooking ability and specialities that were produced by Mrs. Brossi. In the later conferences, we felt it to be necessary to relieve Mrs. Brossi of some of her duties in connection with the conference, and we had gourmet dinners here and there in the valleys of Graubünden. Some gourmet banquets were held when we celebrated birthdays or awards that some of the attending members had received. There was also cheese fondue to be obtained on the mountain just behind the Brossi set of apartments. The afternoon hikes, mild climbs and descents, also involved wild-mushroom-gathering. Gathering of wild mushrooms is one of Arnold Brossi's favorite recreations, and he knows his mushrooms! Fortunately, in the town of Laax there is also a town expert on mushrooms so that one can take the gathered mushrooms to the town expert and let him decide which are poisonous, which are not very tasty, and which will be really excellent either alone or mixed in with wild pheasant or with some special dish of the evening. It has to be said that another of Arnold Brossi's specialities is understanding and appreciating Swiss wine and different cheeses from all parts of Switzerland, so that not only have these conferences been chemically educational but they have been gastronomically very exciting and inspiring because of Arnold's expertise on Swiss wines and cheeses.

You might, as a reader, be wondering whether real chemistry took place at these conferences because there were so many interesting things to do and wonderful things to eat at the conferences. Indeed, chemistry was taken very seriously. We projected films, we projected slides, and we had large pads on which to write our own experiments and theories. The dining room table around which we sat had a slate top, so that one could write on the table with chalk

and afterward erase all the beautiful diagrams. One of the attendees, a very astute gentleman from the west coast, managed to take notes at all of the lectures so that the progress of each of the attendees, especially of those who were repeaters, could be fully monitored. Nothing escaped the attention of those who had listened two years before because progress had to be made in order for a new talk to be given. We shared great science and great companionship.