

Professor Kerber and Markovnikov

Presented by Joseph Lauher in Honor of the Late Professor Patrick J. Herley May 2001

I want to tell you a story about Professor Kerber. One thing you may not know is that Professor Kerber used to have a dog. The dog was a Russian hound named Markovnikov. Professor Kerber loved Markovnikov very much and they got along fabulously, but there were certain rules. When they went to McDonalds's Professor Kerber would buy Happy Meals for two, but Professor Kerber got to choose the toy. If Markovnikov wanted to watch Masterpiece Theater that was ok as long as it was after Professor Kerber had finished watching the latest episode of Buffy on the WB. But the most important rule was the couch. Professor Kerber always got to sit on whichever end of the couch had the most remote controls, Markovnikov always had to sit on the other end.

Now unfortunately the story does not have a happy ending, because one night when Professor Kerber came home after hanging out at the mall all evening he found Markovnikov on the couch next to the remote controls. This was very strange. Markovnikov always obeyed the rules, but this time Markovnikov was not moving. Professor Kerber poked him with his favorite remote, but Markovnikov still did not move. He offered to share his gummy bears, but Markovnikov would not move. After a while Professor Kerber realized that Markovnikov might be dead. Professor Kerber was devastated. He had to be sure, so despite the fact that Professor Kerber is normally very frugal, he decided to take Markovnikov to the vet.

The vet was very sympathetic. First he tried to take Markovnikov's doggie pulse, No luck, no pulse. Then he took out a mirror and held it up to Markovnikov's nose. No signs of doggie breath. The vet said as gently as possible, "I think he is has gone to doggie heaven."

By now Professor Kerber was at wits end. "But, Doc. We have to be sure."

"Ok," said the vet, " if you insist, we can run one more test."

The Vet then brought out a nice wooden box and set it down on the bench across from Markovnikov. A cat jumped out of the box walked over to Markovnikov, sniffed him once or twice, walked around Markovnikov's body, then with a look of total disdain the cat jumped back into the box and went back to sleep.

"Well that confirms it," said the vet. "Markovnikov is dead."

Professor Kerber was crushed, but gracious. "Well, Doc, you did your best. Thanks very much. How much do I owe you."

The vet thought for a moment and then wrote out a bill. "That will be \$520."

Professor Kerber truly did love Markovnikov, but as we said he was also very frugal. "\$520!! Are you crazy? All you did was tell me my dog was dead"

The vet replied, "I am truly sorry, I only charged you \$20 for the visit, but a cat scan is very expensive."

A Park Bench Celebration

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Graduation is a time for celebration and for honoring those who have achieved the most. Our focus today is on the accomplishments of our students, who have done so much to make us proud. However, we also have a very accomplished faculty and I wish to relate to you some of their more momentous achievements. Some of these achievements are well recognized by University or sometimes even national awards, but other times these accomplishments do not achieve the publicity they deserve.

I need to tell you a story. I did not witness the events myself, they were relayed to me by Professor Lauher, who unfortunately could not be here today. He is off partying somewhere in the Midwest. Professor Lauher tells me that last Thursday night he was at the Park Bench, a local establishment with an impeccable reputation for fine spirits. The place was full of students, no chemistry students of course, since it was finals week and they were all home studying. But lots of students were there, mostly psychology majors with a sprinkling of multi-disciplinary and sociology majors thrown in. At about 2:00am, when the crowd was becoming particularly boisterous, in walked two others members of the Chemistry faculty. Now I really can't tell you who they were, their modesty prevents me from doing so, but their initials are D.R. and P.T.

Now P.T. is English by birth, D.R. is English by marriage, so both are quite fond of pubs. On this particular night, P.T. and D.R. were both obviously very happy. Their condition suggested that they had made a few previous stops in Port Jefferson before their arrival at the bench. They walked up to the bar and shouted to the barman, "Drinks for the house. It is time to celebrate."

Now the barman was no fool. He knows that Chemistry Professors are pretty cheap. "Show me the money," says he. At this point D.R. reached into his pocket and pulled out a pile of twenties. The barman helped himself and poured drinks for the house as requested.

Now this got everyone's attention. Even a psych major can understand a free drink. Soon P.T. and D.R. were the center of everyone's attention. "Why are you guys so happy," asked the barman. "Did you get your NIH grants renewed?"

"Much better than that," replied P.T. "We completed a jigsaw puzzle in only 6 months."

The barman seemed a bit skeptical. "Six months! It must have been a pretty difficult puzzle."

D.R. was now over the top, "Difficult, it was horrendous, but we did it in only six months. The box said 2 to 4 years."

Diethyl Ether

Presented by Joseph Lauher in Honor of the Late Professor Patrick J. Herley May 2003

Chemistry laboratories can be very dangerous places. I want to tell you a story about events that happened up on the seventh floor of the chemistry building a year or so ago. Mrs. Marjorie Kandel, Chair of our Safety Committee was conducting an inspection of the research laboratories when she found a very suspicious bottle buried deep back in the corner of one of Professor Ojima's laboratories. She immediately informed Professor Ojima of the offending bottle.

Professor Ojima called in two of his top graduate students, Deric Geng and Ed Wu, and the three of them proceeded into the lab. What they found was a old bottle with the label, "Diethyl Ether", and a date reading 1985. The bottle was covered by a thick white crust. Now old ether bottles are well known for containing explosive compounds called peroxides, so Professor Ojima, being no fool, said to Deric, "you open it."

Deric, also no fool, in turned to Ed, "you open it."

Ed, turned and finding no one else in the lab decided that he had to open it. Ed picked up the flask very gingerly and tried turning the cap, It was stuck fast, wouldn't budge. Deric gave him a hand, both trying loosen the incrustated bottle cap. Seeing their difficulty Professor Ojima joined in holding the bottle as his two students turned the cap with all their might. Then -Poof! The bottle opened and out popped a Genie.

"Yo," said the Genie, "what a relief. Nearly twenty years in an ether flask can give one a headache. It is kind of like being in grad school. For letting me out you guys get three wishes. I guess that's one a piece."

Turning first to Ed? "What can I do for you.?"

Ed thought for bit and said,, "I want my Ph.D. and nice job as research chemist with Pfizer."
Voomp!

Ed was gone, reappearing up in his research lab at Pfizer up in Connecticut.

The Genie then turned to Deric. As I said before, Deric was no fool. "Who wants to be a bench chemist, I want a cushy job, I want to be Vice President for Drug Discovery at Johnson and Johnson.."

Voomp! Deric was gone, reappearing with his feet on the desk in a luxury office in New Jersey.

Then Professor Ojima was left alone in the lab with the Genie. "What can I do for you Professor? What is your heart's desire?"

Now Professor Ojima is a modest man, he gave if careful thought. "I'm a happy man, I don't want anything for myself. What I really would like is to see those two guys back in the lab right now."

Voomp! Voomp!

Baltimore - An Apocalyptic Tale

Presented by Joseph Lauher in Honor of the Late Professor Patrick J. Herley May 2004

Today is a bit of sad day for all of us in the Chemistry Department, because as we bid our graduating students farewell we must also note the departure of one of our most valued colleagues. After thirty years of service in the Chemistry Department, Marjorie Kandel, Coordinator of our Organic Chemistry Teaching laboratories has chosen to retire. We will all miss Marjorie very much; Stony Brook will never be the same without her. Much to the relief of all future chemistry students, reaction yields, melting points and grammar will never be checked so closely again. I ask all of you, students especially, to join me in giving Marjorie a warm round of applause.

But as we note Marjorie's departure from academia, it is appropriate to review how her illustrious academic career began. It began in Baltimore, in the first grade.

In the first grade Marjorie was a remarkable young woman. There was the day she came home, terribly excited, "Mommy. Mommy, today we had counting. The other kids could only go to ten; I could go all the way to twelve, with only two mistakes at the end. Why I am so good with numbers?"

"Marjorie you are so good with numbers, because you are from Baltimore."

Another day, with equal excitement, "Daddy, Daddy, today we had spelling. The other kids could only spell cat and dog, while I could spell aardvark. I had it right, even the teacher was wrong, she said it started with two A's. Why am I such a good speller?"

"Marjorie you are such a good speller, because you are from Baltimore."

The very next day, "Mommy, Mommy, today we had to tell colors. The other kids said they were blue and red, but I knew they were really teal and puce. Why am I so good with colors?"

"Marjorie, you are so good with colors, because you are from Baltimore."

Then finally one day, "Daddy, Daddy, I have always been short, but today the nurse came to class and measured everyone's height. And I was the very tallest kid in the class, even taller than the boys. Is that because I am from Baltimore?"

"No Marjorie, it is not because you are from Baltimore, it is because you are the only twelve year old still in the first grade."

In Honor of those Not Here Today.

Presented by Robert Kerber in Honor of the Late Professor Patrick Herley May 2005

On this wonderful day when we are gathered to honor our chemistry graduates it is important for us to remember some of the students who are not joining us to day. After all chemistry is a difficult subject and not all students make the final cut.

For example I remember Jason, a student in Professor Hanson's General Chemistry course. Professor Hanson had found a disturbing similarity between Jason's final exam and the final exam turned in by Jennifer. And most interesting the seating chart clearly showed that Jason was sitting directly behind Jennifer in the exam room.

Now no faculty member enjoys dealing with such things, so Professor Hanson took a sensible approach. He gave the exam papers to me and left town. Before I could dump the papers on someone else – who appears in my office? Jason no less, declaring his innocence, and proclaiming a vast knowledge of all things chemical.

So with Jason standing there, I looked at the two exam papers for the first time.

“Well Jason let's look at problem 1. Give an example of a strong base. Jennifer wrote acetic acid, and I see that you also wrote acetic acid. How can you explain that?”

“But Professor Kerber, everyone knows that is the right answer. Professor Hanson kept saying over and over that acetic acid wasn't a strong acid. So it has to be a strong base.”

“Now on question two. Jennifer say's that aspirin is a pharmaceutical, a correct answer, but she spells the word wrong and I must note that you have the same misspelling.”

“But Professor Kerber – it is not misspelled. I have known how to spell farm ever since I was a kid. F A R M”

“Ok lets move on. Question 3. Name the compound FeCl_3 . Jennifer wrote “ironic chloride.” And once again you have the same answer.”

“Professor Kerber – why are your persecuting me. Everyone knows that is correct. Only a fool would call FeCl_3 ironous chloride. How can you accuse me of cheating when all I do is put down the correct answers. After all Jennifer and I study together, we both know our chemistry. Together we are a good study team.”

“I then looked at question 4. “Explain the difference between enthalpy and entropy.” I saw that Jason was correct. Together they are a good team. Jennifer answered “I don't have a clue.” While Jason responded, “Me neither.”

Walden - the Pig

Presented in by Robert Kerber Honor of the Late Professor Patrick Herley May 2006

I want to tell you a story about Professor Drueckhammer. One thing you may not know is that Professor Drueckhammer had a pet pig named Walden.

Way back in '03, when Professor Drueckhammer was teaching CHE 321 Organic Chemistry, he used to bring Walden to class. For, you see, Walden, was not just your normal hydrophobic pig, he was indeed a truly remarkable pig.

First, whenever Professor Drueckhammer had doubts about an absolute stereochemical configuration, he would call on Walden for a ruling.

Second, Walden was the only pig I have ever seen that had a peg leg.

Now the kids in his class were very curious about Walden. "Professor Drueckhammer, tell us about Walden," they implored.

"Well - back in Texas, back on the ranch, there was this wolf, we called him Kishner, he was always reducing our cattle herd. One day this wolf Kishner grabbed a lamb right in front of us and started reducing him to nothing. Out of the blue Walden appeared, as fierce a pig as you have ever seen, and he killed that wolf Kishner dead as dead could be. He saved that lamb's life."

"Professor Drueckhammer, is that how Walden lost his leg?"

"No Walden was just fine. After that I took him, taught him to talk, and I taught him organic chemistry. He didn't like talking much, except on his cell, but he really took to organic. Outperformed all the premeds. Fact is, Walden wrote my last NIH proposal."

"But Professor Drueckhammer, what happened to his leg?"

"Oh that – have you kids no sense? When you've got a pig this good, you don't eat him all at once!"