



Gabriel Saucy
December 13, 1927 – November 8, 2014

Gabriel Saucy, 86, a noted synthetic organic chemist, died November 8, 2014 in Audubon, Pennsylvania. During a 30-year career at Hoffmann-La Roche in Basel, Switzerland and Nutley, New Jersey, his contributions were instrumental in the development of processes for the manufacture of vitamins and fine chemicals and resulted in 123 patents and 86 publications.

Born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, Gaby took both his undergraduate and Ph. D. studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, the latter in the laboratory of Nobel Prize recipient Prof. Leopold Ruzicka. His doctoral work involved steroids and sesquiterpenes and set the stage for a career highlighted by a strong interest in the elucidation of novel and efficient synthetic methodology and stereochemical control.

In 1954 he joined Hoffmann-La Roche & Co. A.G. and, as part of a team including Dr. Otto Isler and other Swiss colleagues, devised innovative and practical methods for producing vitamin A and carotenoids as well as fragrance chemicals such as alpha-isomethyl ionone for then Roche subsidiary Givaudan. A notable discovery made during this period was the [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement of propargyl vinyl ethers yielding allenic aldehydes and ketones, a transformation that came to be known as the Saucy-Marbet reaction.

As part of a scientist exchange program between Roche Basel and Roche Nutley, Gaby joined Dr. Leo Sternbach in Nutley where he worked on benzodiazepines, a project of great importance to the company at the time. After returning to Basle, Gaby was invited by Dr. Arnold Brossi to relocate permanently to the Nutley campus, which he did in 1964. He remained there until his retirement in 1985 as Director of Process Research and Development.

The research projects under his direction involved processes for producing vitamins C and E, contraceptive steroids, insect juvenile hormone analogs, peptides and retinoids having anti-cancer activity. He was in the forefront of employing microbiological transformations for obtaining key synthetic intermediates and asymmetric induction leading to enantiomerically pure products.

One of his early interests was finding a totally synthetic route to commercially important 19-norsteroids. Extensive studies in his laboratory led to the development of a novel condensation of chiral hydroxyl vinyl ketones with 2-methyl-cyclopentane-1,3-dione resulting predominantly in

C,D-ring intermediates possessing the desired beta-methyl configuration at C-13. Another example of well-designed synthetic creativity was his utilization of chiral allylic alcohols in the Claisen rearrangement leading to alpha-tocopherol side chain synthons possessing the natural absolute configuration. He also directed synthetic work on retinoids that played a crucial role in the discovery of one of the retinoid X receptors.

After retiring from Roche in 1985, Gaby joined Bio-Mega, Inc. in Montreal, Quebec, Canada as Vice President for Research & Development overseeing the solid-phase synthesis of biologically active peptides. He then held a similar position at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Fort Pierce, Florida directing the isolation and characterization of pharmacologically active marine natural products. He was also a consultant for Bio-Technical Resources in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Gaby was a member of the American Chemical Society (emeritus), the Swiss Chemical Society, the New York Academy of Sciences and the Editorial Board of Organic Synthesis, Inc. where he served as Editor-in-Chief of *Organic Syntheses, Vol. 63* (1985). He helped organize the first *Asymmetric Synthesis* (now *Stereochemistry*) Gordon Conference in 1975, the *International Symposium on Carotenoids and Vitamin A* at the University of Wisconsin in 1978, and the initial *Chemistry as a Life Science Symposium* held at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey in 1982.

Gaby loved skiing and sailing, and was an accomplished painter and cabinet maker. His beautiful modern cabinets were made in his extensive workshop at his Essex Fells, New Jersey home.

Gabriel Saucy is survived by his widow Sonia, daughter Michele Mitchell, son Daniel and six grandchildren.

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