

The Nobel Prize Trip

By Richard Cleaveland

In October it was announced that my wife's stepfather, Charles J. Pedersen (I'll call him "Charlie" from now on) had been awarded a share of the 1987 Nobel prize in Chemistry. The award was for a discovery he had made some twenty years earlier while working as a research chemist at the du Pont laboratories. This was naturally a thrill for all of us in the family and resulted in a considerable change of pace for him, since he was fully retired and 83 years old at the time of the announcement. He also was suffering from myeloma, a type of cancer, and exhibited the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, which made it a little hard for him to get around. His sudden fame brought him many requests for interviews, considerable correspondence, and many invitations to social gatherings.

Since Charlie was the very first du Pont employee to be awarded a Nobel prize, the company was naturally enthralled, and - even though he had been retired for many years - they came to his support by immediately providing a public relations man to him full time and a secretary part time. Then, when it became clear that there was a good possibility that his health would accommodate the acceptance trip to Stockholm, they even arranged to fly him and selected guests of his choice on one of their corporate aircraft.

Charlie chose to take along, as his entourage, his two daughters, his son-in-law (me), three grandchildren with two of their spouses, a close friend and former co-worker and his wife, and his personal physician. Although we felt this was quite a number, it turns out that at least one of the other Nobel winners that year had a greater number of guests.



Press conference at Salem County Courthouse, October 14, 1987. Seated are Charles Pedersen and DuPont Chairman Richard Heckert.



Media at the press conference.



du Pont jet assigned to trip.

We left Wilmington on the evening of the Saturday, December 5th in the DuPont Gulfstream-3 with all but two of the group - my niece Margie with her husband Mike traveled by commercial air and met us there. It was a beautiful flight, and we arrived in Stockholm about 9AM their time in the midst of a minor snowstorm. We were met at the plane by Professor Tord Ganelius of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the organization which selects the Nobel prize winners in Chemistry and Physics, and by Mr. Anders Renquist, First Secretary of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who acted as Charlie's personal attendant for the stay. We were shortly whisked (most of us by bus but Charlie by private limousine which was his for the stay) to the Grand Hotel in downtown Stockholm.

The Grand opened in 1874, and Alfred Nobel himself stayed there during trips to Stockholm in the later years of his life. It of course has been modernized - it had flush toilets even before the Royal Palace, which was just across the way - and we generally found it quite comfortable. There WAS one exception to this, however. The bathroom facilities all seemed to have been built for particularly tall people. My 5-foot-two Barbara had to stand on tiptoes to brush her teeth, for example, and Charlie couldn't manage the high edge of the tub so had to sponge-bathe for the stay. We arranged to have Charlie have a nice two-room suite directly above the hotel entrance lobby while Barbara and I occupied a room adjacent to his sitting room so that we could provide him with the close personal support he needed. Others of the group were in nearby rooms on the same floor.



The Grand Hotel.



View from our room.

We found food and drink fairly expensive in terms of the US dollar. The only bargain was the hotel's "free" continental breakfast, which was delivered promptly at the requested time for only a small service charge of 25 Kroner - a little more than four dollars to us. We were to find that our favorite cocktail - a Manhattan - cost about twelve dollars each, but that's partly because Sweden tries very hard to discourage drinking alcoholic beverages. Otherwise, restaurant meals cost about fifty to a hundred percent more than we would expect to pay in comparable places at home.

The first evening - after most of the day was devoted to our initial attempts to cope with the six hour change of time we acquired during the eight hour flight - there was a reception in the hotel for the Nobel laureates and their guests. This was our first opportunity to get acquainted with those with whom we would share most of the week's activities. Besides Charlie, there were two others who shared the Chemistry prize, Professors Cram (UCLA) and Lehn (College de France, Paris).

These two had built upon Charlie's discovery and work. There also were two Physics laureates, Messrs. Bednorz and Møller, the winner in Medicine Dr. Tonegawa, the Literature award winner Russian exile Joseph Brodsky and the winner of the Bank of Sweden prize in economics, Dr. Solow of MIT. This latter prize is not, per se, one of the prizes established by Nobel in his will, it was endowed by the Bank of Sweden in Nobel's memory several years after Nobel's death. Dr. Tonegawa probably had the largest guest group, about eighteen including his new baby and his "proudest father in the world."



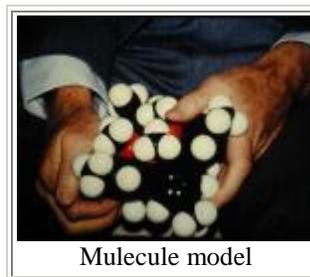
The three Chemistry winners: Cram, Lehn and Pedersen

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by the Norwegian Storting (parliament) in Oslo, so we didn't have the opportunity to meet President Arias.

A short TV program was displayed on monitors for us. This program, made a few years earlier, gave us an idea of what the official ceremony and banquet the coming Thursday were to be like. Following the reception our group had dinner in the hotel's cafe, and we had our first experience with Swedish fare. The menu's emphasis on fish - and the variety of fish on the optional buffet dishes - was not particularly to the liking of Barbara and myself, as we are not fond of it, but we eventually learned to enjoy some varieties.

Late the next morning there was a press conference at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences building on the University campus. There was an initial "photo opportunity" followed by the laureates answering of questions posed by members of the press.

Understandably, many of the questions were directed to Professor Solow, the Economics laureate, who was pressed to solve the world's problems on the spot. I made a recording of the entire proceedings, and took many pictures. Professor Cram made a hit with his model of one of the types of molecules discovered by Charlie.



Molecule model

We went to lunch at a "cafe" with Charlie that day. Swedish cafes are sort of like our cafeterias (hence, I guess, the name). This was our first experience out in the general public sans official escort, and it was with some trepidation that we faced the display of foods with unfamiliar names all written in Swedish, many of them not looking like they were fit to eat. We quickly discovered that almost everyone in Sweden speaks English, as it has for some time been a required language in their schools, and the serving girl explained that the relatively unappetizing foods were in fact selections which would be cooked to order after selection.

That evening there was a reception at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences hosted by Professor and Mrs. Ganelius. The reception was held in the lobby and meeting room of the Royal Academy, and we enjoyed being where the decisions had been made. The walls of the meeting room were festooned by original oil paintings of many - perhaps all? - of the prior members of the Academy, including Celsius. Following the reception there was a private informal dinner hosted by Professor and Mrs. Ganelius for the laureates and their wives. Charlie, being a widower, escorted Shirley Evans, Barbara's sister to this affair while the rest of us returned to the hotel for dinner.

Tuesday was speech day, when the laureates in chemistry and physics presented their Nobel Lectures. The lecture is the only activity really required of a prize winner, but it seems inconceivable that a winner would not want to participate in at least some of the other activities of the week. Charlie did exceedingly well with his presentation, which was attended by a mixture of officials, peers, well-wishers, press and students. The excellent reception his lecture received was particularly rewarding to all of us as he had been an independent researcher nearly all of his career, and public speaking was not one of those things which came easily to him. Needless to say, I have it on tape.



Charles Pedersen giving his Nobel Laureate speech

That noon Charlie attended an informal luncheon with Prof. Ganelius, while the rest of us went our separate ways for lunch. Barbara and I waked a few blocks from the hotel (it was terribly cold and windy that day) and had lunch in a little restaurant nearby. That evening the family members all gathered in the sitting room for a room service dinner. I had a mushroom omelet that was so good that I ordered it twice again later in the week. Barbara, on the other hand, had a plain omelet on another occasion that she felt was poorly prepared.

Wednesday morning most of us went on a bus tour of the Stockholm area arranged for the convenience of the laureates and their guests. We learned that the city consists of several closely-spaced islands, fourteen in number. Our hotel faces the water, and across the water is another island with the Royal Palace facing us. The water in between is the main discharge of a large fresh water lake into the Baltic sea, and it races along at a pretty fast clip. Right in front of the hotel is where the fresh and salt water mix, and fishing is supposed to be great there. We saw a few people fishing later in the week, but no catches. The tour took us onto many of the islands, and we passed by one of the homes of Alfred Nobel.

During the tour we stopped at the site where the warship WASA is being restored. It foundered in Stockholm harbor on its maiden voyage in 1628 as a result of poor design, and lay entombed in the mud until its discovery and raising in 1961. The 62 meter ship is extremely ornate, with highly intricate carvings just about every place one looks - even on the gun port hatch covers. Aside from this stop, we pretty much rushed through the tour, as many of us were scheduled for a luncheon at the American Embassy.



Hull of the warship Wasa, sunk in 1628

Ambassador and Mrs. Gregory Newell had invited the American laureates and their guests to lunch at their residence. They are a charming and attractive couple, and lunch was superb.

Later in the afternoon there was another reception, this one hosted by the Nobel Foundation at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. The Nobel Foundation is the organization that administers the endowments, pays out the money to the winners, and so forth. This reception was very heavily attended, and although the hall was fairly large it was quite crowded. Charlie mentioned to me that he would like to meet and chat with the literature winner Brodsky, and so I looked him up and they met. I gather it was somewhat of a disappointment for both of them - Brodsky didn't show any interest in the chemist's poetry, and all of Brodsky's poetry was in Russian so Charlie couldn't properly appreciate it.

Thursday, the anniversary of Nobel's death, was the big day. All of us gentlemen had to get rigged up with white tie and tails and the ladies in formal wear, and at four in the afternoon were transported to the Stockholm Concert Hall for the formal presentation of the awards. Earlier in the day Charlie had attended a dress rehearsal and complained of some neck pain, so during the afternoon he and his doctor went to a hospital for some x-rays. They showed there was no danger from bone deterioration, so things proceeded normally except that Charlie acquired a support collar to use if he wanted to later on.



Charles Pedersen with Shirley and Barbara

The presentation was magnificent. Our group was seated in the front row of the audience along with several others including a portion of the royal family. The King, Queen, King's uncle and aunt were seated on stage right, while the laureates entered stage



Nobel presentation stage. The royal family sits in the chairs on the on the right of the picture, Laureates enter from the rear center and sit to the left of the stage.

center and seated to the left. Except Charlie. They decided that, given his difficulty in walking at a reasonable pace, he should enter stage left and go directly to his chair. We understand that DuPont people back in the states were watching the ceremony on TV and nearly had heart attacks when they didn't see him in the entering group. There were several speeches by officials, just about all in Swedish, and various selections from the orchestra. We were provided a little booklet upon entering with the English translations of the speeches. The crowning moment for each laureate was when he and the king approached center stage and the king presented him with the gold medal and diploma. Immediately there was a fanfare, and the laureate bowed to the king, the audience and, sometimes, to the several officials seated behind the royal family and laureates on the stage, returning then to his seat.

It was during this event when again things went differently for our personal laureate. In recognition of Charlie's walking difficulties, the king proceeded way across the stage to where Charlie had just risen to present him the award. Much was made of this break with tradition, both locally and in international press releases. To me it just seemed like the decent thing to do. When the ceremony was over and the royal family had departed, the families of the laureates went up on the stage to give their congratulations.

Then we were all transported to the city hall for the banquet. This event has a very special reputation. They serve about 1300 people, including the royal family, and the menu is (supposedly) a well-kept secret until serving time. Seats were assigned, and booklets were handed out in the lobby which showed each person where everyone was to sit, complete with a fold-out map of the table arrangements. There were over 100



Banquet hall being prepared.

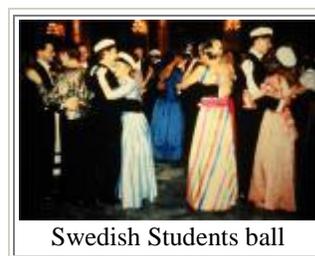
servers, and the entire banquet was choreographed carefully. Each course was introduced with a parade of servers (like similar events on cruise ships, in my experience), and terminated by the servers, having been stationed at their respective places, taking the cue to start picking up plates and cutlery by watching the leader positioned on the grand staircase. Several kinds of wine flowed fairly freely - but again on prearranged parade and cue from the leader. While the menu was fairly extensive, the food itself was not particularly notable. The main course was hare, and it was overdone to the extent that it was dry - reminded me of well done calves liver in texture. The desert was a fancy ice cream cake which challenged the skill of the servers - ours gave up and had us serve ourselves from the plate.

Charlie had the great fortune to be seated between the Queen and the wife of the Prime Minister, Fru Ingrid Carlsson. There are some excellent photographs of the event, showing how he engaged in spirited conversation with these ladies. To say that he enjoyed their company would be an understatement, and I gather the feeling was mutual.

During dinner there were a number of items of entertainment. The orchestra played several selections, the leading Swedish vocalist sang a couple of numbers, and a student band put on an amusing display complete with a dancing bass drummer and firework-spouting tuba. There were also a few brief speeches by laureates (one in each category). Prof. Lehn gave the Chemistry speech (in French - I taped it but don't know what he said except that he mentioned Charlie several times).

After dinner, and coincident with the start of the ball (in a separate room upstairs from the main banquet room) the royal family received the laureates and their family members in an anteroom. Although he was pretty much exhausted by this time and made arrangements to go back to the hotel immediately after dinner, Charlie made arrangements that we would not be denied this honor, and we met the royal couple. They are both attractive and personable, and chatted with us at some length. The king seemed to have a little difficulty understanding the difference between a chemist (as Charlie is) and a chemical engineer, as his grandson Ron and Ron's wife are.

The ball was quite crowded, and Barbara and I stayed only long enough for one dance. Traditionally the students - to which the Nobel week is a great event - have what they call a "nightcap" - a ball after the ball, complete with more entertainment and food, lasting well into the wee hours. Although invited, we didn't elect to attend, but the younger generation of our party did. It turned out to



Swedish Students ball

be a matter of great embarrassment all around, as the entertainers that had been hired chose (we were later told) to perform an "unauthorized" act more appropriate to the back streets of Paris than a Nobel activity. There was so much unhappiness about that that the next morning notes and calls of apology were distributed by the

student organizers. The young lady who organized the entertainment and hired the troupe was reported to be in tears as she talked to Baron Stig Ramel, the Executive Director of the Nobel Foundation, the next morning, for fear that the cooperation between the two organizations might fracture. Our family members who attended weren't too badly shocked, however, as the narrative was all in Swedish and nearby Swedes were too embarrassed to translate for them.

Friday morning was "sleep-in and recover" period. During the afternoon, I went with Charlie, his du Pont guests and his doctor to the offices of the Nobel Foundation and witnessed the actual handing over of the prize medal and diploma (they had kept them safely for the laureates after the presentation by the king so that they wouldn't get lost in the shuffle of the banquet, ball and other revelry). They also made arrangements for the actual transfer of the prize money. This year is the first where the IRS gets a bite of the award from the United States recipients. No other country taxes the prizes. The medal weighs about 200 grams and is solid gold, making it worth about \$3,000. At these offices I saw the original will of Alfred Nobel. He did it himself, without the benefit of a lawyer (he felt negative about lawyers) and this later may have caused considerable difficulty as his will was contested and his estate not settled for several years after his death. Friday evening there was a formal banquet for the laureates



Charles Pedersen accepting awards.



Nobel certificate and medal.

and their spouses given by the royal family. Charlie escorted Barbara to this occasion, and I was left on my own for the evening (I had dinner with Shirley). Barbara reports that, when they arrived there were separate coat rooms for the gentlemen and ladies, and that the ladies coat room was equipped with mirrors. There were about a hundred and fifty at the royal banquet, all seated at one long table and again a diagram had been handed out in advance so all would know where they were to sit. Charlie sat with Fru Skold to his right; she is the wife of His Excellency Herr Riksmarskalken Skold, the kingdom's Marshal. On his left was Madame Vaerno, wife of the Ambassador of Norway, while Madame Tonegawa was seated opposite. The queen was five places to his right.

Again Charlie was treated to a singular experience. Because the banquet room was on one of the upper floors of the palace and there were a lot of distances involved, the royal family had managed to find an ancient sedan chair, and Charlie was propelled around the place by a couple of palace attendants! One of the remaining tasks for Anders Renquist is to try to find out some of the history of that chair - for whom it may have been built, who used it last, and so forth. It wasn't the full-blown sort of sedan chair, it didn't have a cover and so forth, it was an "indoor" version.

The main course for the dinner was venison; it was reported that the deer were actually hunted down by the king personally. After dinner the group retired to an anteroom for coffee and drinks, and during this period the king sat down with Charlie and chatted for a while. He said that he and the queen were planning to travel to Delaware the coming spring as part of a celebration of the Swedish colonization of the area, and that perhaps they would have the opportunity to visit again with Charlie.

Saturday was a free day for shopping and so forth. Several of us took the opportunity to join a specially-arranged tour of the grounds of the country royal palace and an adjacent historic theatre. Given the bitter cold day we didn't wander the formal palace gardens very much, but we did enjoy the tour of the theatre. It was built in the 1700's, as I recall, as the court theatre for the summer palace during the reign of an arts-oriented king. After his death it fell into disuse as a theatre but remained standing as a storage building. Earlier this century it was restored, and now plays are presented there during the summer season. The restoration was as authentic as possible, with the only variation I noted being the conversion of candle lighting to electric lights simulating candles. We were treated to a demonstration of some of the mechanical sound effects (thunder, wind) and got to see the extensive mechanical arrangements in the area beneath the stage and in the wings. We saw where the troupe members slept - it being the standard in those days for the actors and actresses to live in the theatre during the season.

Sunrise comes late this time of year - about eight or so - and sunset early, in the vicinity of three or four in the afternoon. The sun doesn't get very high at midday either. I'd say it was about twenty degrees or so over the horizon at the most. That made both sunrise and sunset quite lengthy processes, and gave me the opportunity to capitalize on the beautiful sunset this day by photographing it from our hotel room window.

In the evening our group had dinner at the home of Mr. Franz Erhardt, Manufacturing Director, DuPont Scandinavia. It was a beautiful place on the side of a hill overlooking their guest house and dock with a nice view of an inlet to the Baltic. We had the classic "glugg" spiced mulled wine, followed by an excellent



Summer Palace



Summer Palace.



Summer Palace theater entrance.

dinner with several courses of fish - the latter one a poached salmon that was terrific. Franz and his hostess Annette made us feel quite at home.

Sunday morning was a special event. Swedes celebrate Santa Lucia day, and in the hotel this meant that the laureates were serenaded in their beds by a group of roving singers first thing in the morning. The lead singer, always a girl, wears a crown festooned with burning candles. They arrive and depart to the strains of - yes - "Santa Lucia" and sing a few other selections as well. Although the costumes seem somewhat medieval, the celebration in Sweden is a relatively new thing, we were told.



Santa Lucia carolers

Sunday evening was the "Lucia Dinner" - a student-sponsored banquet and dance in celebration of the day and of the Nobel laureates who stayed for the event (most of them did). The seating was a masterpiece of arrangement. Each person was seated across from his or her escort, and, at least within my view, alternated between students and guests. I was bracketed by a pair of very charming young ladies, and Barbara by their student escorts. The girl on my left was a member of the student union congress, and a student of law, as was her fiance on Barb's right. It was helpful to have these Swedes nearby as the evening progressed with the group singing of many drinking songs, most of them in Swedish, and translations helped us enjoy them more. There was a Lucia serenade almost exactly like the one which had welcomed the day - we even suspect it might have been the same lead singer. Charlie had to leave early due to discomfort with the chair and the noise, and Barbara accompanied him back to the hotel. Later in the evening there were some hi-jinks constituting initiation of a few students and all laureates into the order of the frog. Membership in this order is conferred upon persons who have done something particularly notable during the preceding year. Charlie was initiated in a private ceremony on his way out, so he has the honor of having a bright green frog medallion to wear even though he missed the main event. The dinner lasted quite late, so the older generation that was still there left before the dancing began, leaving it up to the youngsters to represent us for that phase.

Monday was departure day. Packed and ready to leave by 9:30 we were taken to the airport in limousines, exchanged our value-added tax receipts for American dollars and boarded the G-3 which had been waiting for us during our stay. During the entire stay Anders Renquist had shepherded us around with great skill and sensitivity, and the limousine driver Tommy Mansson had done an excellent job of getting us around, so we spent some time with them saying goodbyes. We were ready to go home, though.

The flight back was nearly as perfect as the one out. We had to stop to refuel due to the headwinds, and the refueling stop was at Goose Bay Labrador rather than Iceland as originally planned. That disappointed some of the group since they had

planned to buy some Icelandic sweaters. Goose Bay was barren, and we landed in a mild snowstorm. Lunch was under our belts by that time, and when we took off for the last leg we had a hot dinner of steak. We landed at Wilmington at about two in the afternoon and this time it wasn't snowing. Customs and immigration were quickly and efficiently handled right on board the aircraft, and we shortly gathered up our baggage, found our cars and drove off.

I can't say enough about the kindness DuPont showed us by providing the private air transport. I suspect that it would have been a very heavy burden on Charlie to try to make the trip by commercial air, and indeed he may have elected not to go if it were not for that.

Dick Cleaveland December 23, 1987