

Editorial – Special Issue Dedicated to Professor Victor Snieckus



Victor Snieckus, *Synlett* Editor since 1990; photo by Greg Black

Victor A. Snieckus was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, on Aug. 1, 1937, the son of an Estonian mother and Lithuanian father. The onset of World War II heavily influenced his early years, since his family spent the war years in Germany. He immigrated to Canada in 1948, initially living in Foremost, AB, before settling in Calgary. Victor completed his B.Sc. (Honors) at the University of Alberta in 1959, acquired an M.Sc. degree with D. S. Noyce at UC Berkeley in 1961 and then completed his Ph.D. degree with V. Boekelheide at the University of Oregon in 1965. Following postdoctoral work with O. E. Edwards at the National Research Council in Ottawa from 1965–66, he joined the faculty at the University of Waterloo as an Assistant Professor, becoming an Associate Professor in 1971 and a Full Professor in 1979. From 1992–98, Victor held an NSERC-Monsanto Industrial Research Chair in Chemical Synthesis and Biomolecular Design. In 1998, he moved to the department of Chemistry at Queen's University as the inaugural Bader Chair in Organic Chemistry, one of the most preeminent positions in Organic Chemistry in Canada. He retired from teaching in 2009, but he has maintained an active research group as Bader Chair Emeritus.

In the context of his research accomplishments, it is fair to say that Victor is a giant in directed lithiation and heterocyclic chemistry. For instance, his early research at Waterloo focused primarily on heterocyclic chemistry, with particular emphasis on the chemistry of a new 1,2-diazepine system. Nevertheless, the realization of the practical synthetic potential of directed *ortho* lithiation of tertiary benzamides altered his direction permanently, beginning in 1978/79. Since that time, Victor has advanced the directed *ortho* metalation (DoM) process to a point where it is commonly employed tactic in organic synthesis in both academic and industrial settings. In fact, the use of directing groups has enabled the development of C–H activation chemistry, which is a catalytic version of the former and thus illustrates the impact of his work. To this end, he has developed a number of directed metalation groups, particularly the *O*-aryl carbamate. En route, his group discovered the anionic *ortho*-Fries rearrangement, directed benzylic and remote metalation (DreM) and advanced new carbanionic chemistry of aliphatic amides and carbamates. As the DoM reaction matured, he linked the tactic to other processes such as cross-coupling reactions of several different

types, radical cyclizations and ring-closing metathesis. More recently he has focused on some very interesting *meta*-directed iridium-catalyzed C–H activation reactions. A key and striking feature with his research is the level of scientific rigor and the ability to apply these discoveries to challenging problems. For instance, he has a long-standing relationship with industry, which has involved the successful translation of his work to a number of important industrial processes.

In the course of this journey, he has trained and educated 75 Ph.D. and M.Sc. students, along with more than 100 postdoctoral fellows from across the globe. Indeed, many remember his endlessly positive style of motivation, his attention to detail and a genuine interest in their progress after they leave the VS group. He is also known for his availability, patience and willingness to talk to absolutely anyone on any subject, but especially to share and understand chemical ideas. As someone who interacts regularly and willingly with his students, Victor is renowned for group Christmas parties that invariably turn into road-hockey games.

Unsurprisingly, with the prevalence of DoM and its synthetic applications has come recognition in the form of awards, which include the Alfred Bader Award (1993), Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (1993), Humboldt-Forschungspreis (1996), R. U. Lemieux Award (1997), Fellow of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (1999), Killam Fellowship (2000-01), Cope Scholar Award (2001), ISHC Award in Heterocyclic Chemistry (2001), AstraZeneca Excellence Award (2001), Bernard Belleau Award (2005), ISHC Fellow (2007), Fellow of the American Chemical Society (2009) and the Global Lithuanian Award (2013). Victor also serves the community as an Editor of *Synfacts*, covering the area of Polycyclic Aromatic Compounds. He has also contributed to the organic chemistry community as an Editor and a member of several Advisory and Editorial Advisory Boards for prominent journals in the field. In addition, he has served as the Chair of the International Conference in Heterocyclic Chemistry (1985), the President of the International Society of Heterocyclic Chemistry (1985) and Chair of the ACS Organic Division (1989-90). For well over a decade, he has actively promoted closer interaction between the Canadian Society for Chemistry and the American Chemical Society. In addition, he has also been tireless in his efforts to assist in the exposure of the organic chemistry community of the Baltic States to Western chemists, by co-founding a major international meeting in the Baltic States (*Balticum Organicum Syntheticum*) and continuously supporting it over the years.

Victor's connection to *Synlett* dates back to the birth of the Journal, since he was one of five founding editors and was responsible for handling papers from the Americas for nearly 25 years. At the end of 2017 Victor will officially retire from the *Synlett* Editorial Board but will remain a very active member of the Editorial Advisory Board and a champion for the journal's mission.

A long time before metalating (1966), Victor married Anne and they have two children, Darius and Naomi. He readily acknowledges his family's encouragement and support of his dedication to chemistry and particularly Anne, whose sustenance of VS groups over the years is cherished by all.



Vic together with Paul Knochel, Monaco, 2006

Lastly, Victor's joie de vivre is infectious and tireless. As anyone that has met him can attest, he is an extreme and inclusive extrovert, chatting up chemists of all ages and backgrounds, often late into the night. He is a constant presence at conferences, always more than a casual attendee with probing and insightful questions of speakers and can make friends in any circumstance. Sharing his passion for chemistry is only occasionally eclipsed by his other passion, which is the initiation of chemists of all ages into the savage mental game of *Cardinal Puff*.

As you can see from the Table of Contents, Victor's fan base spans the world, clear evidence for the esteem that many hold for him. The article authors and the editors of *Synlett*, *Synthesis* and *Synfacts* are pleased to offer this Special Issue in recognition of Victor's many contributions to the field of Organic Chemistry as well as his extraordinary passion and service as an Editor for *Synlett*. Victor continues to explore new directions of research and to mentor more scientists.

Happy Birthday, Victor! You are truly a Chemist for *All Seasons* and a giant in the field!

P. Andrew Evans, James R. Green and Tomislav Rovis

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The Thieme Chemistry family at the Editorial Board Meeting, Aix-en-Provence, 2011.