

The Spectrum

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Nobel Laureate
Roald Hoffmann





Few individual scientists have received as many accolades in the chemical community as Roald Hoffmann. A refugee from war torn Poland, Professor Hoffmann found his American dream through the Bronx School of Science, Columbia University and Harvard. While a twenty-five year old Junior Fellow of the Harvard Corporation, he collaborated with the late Robert Burns Woodward in what became known almost as soon as it was published as the Woodward-Hoffmann rules. The collaboration of an organic chemist like Woodward, who in days before on-line literature searching had an almost computer-like recollection of the scientific literature, and the young theorist Hoffmann, seeking to understand and explain, led to theories that have driven scientific research in many areas, including the photochemical sciences, since. Though Hoffmann will claim, too modestly, that he knew little organic chemistry when his rules were proposed, physical organic chemistry books, and even undergraduate organic texts, have not been the same since Woodward-Hoffmann.

Hoffmann is not shy about telling his story and complimenting the America that enabled his dream. Like many others, including my own ancestors, he found on the welcome shores of America a chance to develop his skills to the level of his own abilities and succeed.

As an educator I've been lucky enough to know more than my share of "real" Americans—young people who came here, studied at our universities, and then made America their home. Recently, I accompanied two of our former graduate students, both of whom are now employed in the area, as they took the oath of citizenship and became Americans. Each had lived his/her own life in countries where there were fewer freedoms than here. Each had seen his/her own parents persecuted for their religious beliefs. Finally, after conquering a new language and studying at our University, they achieved the time when they would no longer have to worry about an immigration officer, an expired visa, or a misplaced critical document. Now and forever they are "real" Americans.

In the recent American election much was said about immigrants. Some Americans have the peculiar view that *they and only they* are *real* Americans, and few from foreign shores need apply. But many here now are only here because immigration rules were more lax when their forefathers were admitted. One can only wish that these "real" Americans would be half as generous to others as the Americans of the past were to them.

That's why it is such a delight to tell Roald Hoffmann's story in this issue of *The Spectrum*. We are honored to feature such a distinguished scientist. We are equally as honored to highlight the opportunity America and its educational system offered him to succeed first in our university system and then as a Nobel Laureate. We remain optimistic that the same American opportunities will be available for many like him now and well into the future.

D. C. Nechev

