

# PREFACE



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In the late 1990s, already close to my retirement, I was approached by my colleague and friend John Fackler Jr. of Texas A&M University with the idea to write my autobiography. At that time, John was senior editor of a series with the title *Profiles in Inorganic Chemistry* and had successfully recruited a number of protagonists of inorganic chemistry for the first few books in the series. I was of course honored by the offer to join these celebrities of our field of science. I promised John to give it a try and to find out if I liked to recollect all the circumstances that had led me into a life in research and teaching at universities, and that took me into positions of academic administration and science organizations, with contacts literally all over the globe.

Surprisingly, in the beginning I made great progress in my writing because it was both great fun and a challenge to reconstruct details of my early life in the turbulent decades before, during and after World War II and in the years when I started my career at universities. However, when approaching the more recent decades, I found their coverage of the later decades much harder owing to the increased complexity and in the end this made me stop writing for more than 15 years. I did keep the manuscript that covered the years up to 1965, which was written in English as required by John and the publisher. In the end I cancelled my contract as the proposed date of submission of the manuscript was already long overdue.

After more than a decade in retirement, as an emeritus at the Technical University of Munich, I remembered my manuscript and felt that now it might be fun to resume my writing. Soon thereafter it also happened that the German Chemical Society (GDCh) considered supporting a series *Lives in Chemistry* and I was again invited to contribute my biography. I am particularly grateful to Eva Wille, Peter Göllitz and Henning Hopf of the Advisory Board of this new series who encouraged me to continue in my already resumed writing.

I produced a format which I think may be the greatest fun for a mixed readership. On the one hand, in all its chapters it reflects the historical background of the last 80 years which set the stages for my education and my professional career, and it also draws a picture of the people with whom I spent longer periods in my life, and of others who made a great impression even though I may have seen or met them only briefly. On the other hand, for many readers—the hardcore chemistry nerds—it probably has far too little chemistry, because I felt that a plethora of chemical formulae would detract from the role of the scientific community which coined the research and the teaching in all these years. Modern means of literature search make it very easy for everybody to find any details that are missing here. I hope that in the end this format will be accepted as a good compromise. It could also deliver the message for young people that a life in science and research leaves nothing to be desired.

The title now reflects my feeling that I started with traditional chemical craftsmanship performing straightforward synthetic and analytical work in more conventional areas of research, and then finally step by step ended up mainly in studies of molecular structure and bonding at the frontiers of the chemical sciences. It happened that most of the later work focused on the chemistry of gold and therefore the title of the book appears to be literally true.

As mentioned above, the book initially was written mainly for the entertainment of colleagues, friends and family. However, in its present form it can also bring back memories to many other people with whom I had contacts over more than six decades. I hope that it will not be found boring even for those who never had an interest in chemistry. For me, chemistry has opened a unique chance to enjoy a long and most colorful life which I would like to share with others by offering them this autobiography.

*Hubert Schmidbaur*