

Acceptance of the Roebling Medal of the Mineralogical Society of America for 1993

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Madam President, esteemed colleagues, and friends:

When contemplating what I should say at this auspicious event, I realized that whatever success I have had in my career has been the result of a series of lucky chances. Perhaps the luckiest chance of all was to be born in New Zealand, an isolated country but one with an excellent education system—free through college but subject to qualifying exams at the end of elementary and high school. In 1937 I was in the final year of my M.Sc. program, doing a research project on the electrochemistry of dilute solutions (slightly polluted water), when I picked up the latest issue of the *Journal of the Chemical Society* and read an article by V. M. Goldschmidt, “The Principles of Distribution of the Chemical Elements in Minerals and Rocks.” It changed my life. Solid-state chemistry had been barely touched on in my chemistry courses—here was a vast field about which I knew nothing but was anxious to learn. At that time, the University of New Zealand had no doctoral program, but one could apply for a graduate scholarship of £200 (\$1000) a year for two years to study abroad. I received one and wrote to V. M. Goldschmidt in Oslo, explaining my circumstances and saying that I wanted to do research in geochemistry. I received a delightful reply, saying that he would welcome a student from the antipodes and that I could live like a king in Oslo on £200 a year. There was no request for a transcript or other documentation—life was much simpler in those days.

I left New Zealand bound for Norway. My father, who had a quirky sense of humor, had promised that if I graduated with honors he would buy me a one-way ticket to anywhere in the world, so he paid my fare. I decided to travel via the U.S. and arrived in San Francisco with a \$52 Greyhound bus ticket to take me to New York by whatever route I might choose. I then recalled a lecture by Howel Williams, professor of petrology at Berkeley, that I heard when he visited New Zealand in 1937. I phoned him (I was pretty forward in those days), and he invited me to Berkeley, where I spent an interesting day meeting some of the greats, including A. C. Lawson, and Howel Williams mapped out a one-month odyssey across the U.S. for me. Among his suggestions was that I contact Ian Campbell at Caltech. This I did, and I spent a delightful day with Ian in Pasadena. I remember being impressed by the view of the San Gabriel Mountains from the campus, a view seldom seen today.

On April 9, 1940, I awoke to German warplanes flying over Oslo. I was rather immobile at the time, having broken a leg skiing. I had breakfast, made a package of



sandwiches, cashed a check, and sat in the springtime sun contemplating a future as a guest of Adolf Hitler! Another lucky chance intervened. At about 10 a.m., the lecturer in English at the university arrived with his car, which he had taken out of winter storage only the previous day. After some minor adventures, we eventually arrived in Stockholm, where I remained until August 1943. After my escape to Sweden, Ian Campbell was sufficiently concerned about my fate to track me down through the Red Cross. He then acted as a go-between for letters from New Zealand to me in Sweden, and I sent him reprints of my publications.

In 1946 I was back in New Zealand, teaching at my old college. In November I received a letter from the chairman of the Geology Department at Indiana University, offering me the professorship in mineralogy. After some amicable negotiations regarding salary, I accepted and arrived in Bloomington in September 1947. When I met the chairman, Charles Deiss, I inquired, why me? knowing that it was unusual for a university to hire sight-

unseen. I learned that at first the position had been offered to Ian Campbell, and when he declined Deiss asked him if he could recommend someone. He replied that he knew a young New Zealander who had a moderate publication record and might fill the bill, and so I came to the U.S.—another lucky chance.

Indiana University was the place for another fortunate event, the arrival of Ross Taylor as a graduate student in geochemistry, which became the beginning of a productive relationship, which has now extended through 40 years.

Another significant event was my move to the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1953. Shortly after I arrived, the meteorite collection, which had been housed in the Hayden Planetarium, was transferred to my department. I spent my first summer in New York checking the collection against the catalogue and was entranced by this wealth of material—others could work on terrestrial rocks, but I had one of the finest collections of extraterrestrial rocks in the world, an almost untapped source for research. (At that time meteorites

were generally considered as curios, to be stashed away in museum drawers and forgotten.) All this changed, of course, with the advent of Sputnik and the initiation of the Apollo program. I have been privileged to spend the last forty years in this ever-expanding research field. Also, as a museum curator, I have had the opportunity of supplying research material to a large number of scientists, thereby acquiring many friends and acquaintances and enjoying vicarious satisfaction in their results. In this connection the fall of the Allende meteorite in Mexico in February 1969 may be added as a happy accident. With my colleague Roy Clarke, I was in the field a few days after the fall, and we returned with 150 kg of this unique meteorite. Not only did it provide ample material for our own investigations, but we have provided research material from it to scientists throughout the world.

As a result of these lucky chances, I have enjoyed an exciting and productive career, capped by this award. I am truly grateful to my colleagues for this mark of appreciation. Thank you all very much.