

# Lives in Chemistry

## Inspirational Autobiographies

Eva E. Wille\*

\*Correspondence: Dr. E. E. Wille, E-mail: eewille@l-i-c.org  
GDCh, Weinheim



**Abstract:** On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the project 'Lives in Chemistry' (LiC) became visible through the virtual global launch event <https://l-i-c.org/launch.html>.

### The Idea

The idea behind this collection of autobiographies of eminent chemists is convincingly simple. Chemists whose achievements became textbook knowledge, or which resulted in 'game-changing' products, are invited by an Advisory Board of GDCh's History of Chemistry Division to reflect on their extraordinarily creative lives in chemistry. LiC autobiographies were initiated and are sponsored by the entrepreneur Karl Reuter, Freiburg, who was fascinated by his PhD advisor Günther Maier, Giessen, whose sparking creativity lasted for many decades; he tamed and prepared many 'forbidden' molecules, such as the most famous tetrahedrane in 1978.

LiC aims at creating an authentic library to trace and illustrate how innovative chemistry happens over a long life of research and how diverse the creative process can be. The aim thus is to

- encourage and stimulate young chemists
- show how new chemical knowledge is generated
- document the interdependency between chemistry and societal circumstances.

### The Challenges

Chemical researchers are trained and eager to write scientific articles and to give lectures about their results – would they also be prepared to look back and write well documented scientific autobiographies? Chemistry students and early career researchers: would they read books in these social media dominated times?

### The Achievements

*Summer 2021:* The first three autobiographies by Henri Brunner, Gerhard Ertl and Günther Maier were released. A virtual Young Chemists reading club, organized by GDCh's membership magazine *Nachrichten aus der Chemie* demonstrated keen interest in this generation.

*Summer 2022:* The LiC series was awarded with a Gold Medal by the Stiftung Buchkunst for its outstanding design, underlining that these autobiographies were truly special.

*Autumn 2022:* Two more autobiographies (by Dieter Oestereich and Stephen Kent) published. The Advisory Board, past, ongoing and future authors, sponsor and chemical researchers of his company as well as high school students met in a two-day intense workshop.

*2022/2023:* Events were organized, mostly by young chemists, in Berlin, Ulm and Stuttgart together with authors and their



Katharina Fromm (photo by Eva E. Wille at ECC8 Lisbon 2022).

former coworkers. All meetings attracted broad and multi-generational audiences. For most of them, these were 'unchartered territories' as they had never thought about how famous former faculty members had achieved their 'fame'. For many it gave insight into the recent history of their field of research and institutions. New perspectives and thoughts suddenly opened, giving ideas for future research avenues.

*Spring 2023:* Autobiography of Franz Effenberger and an amended English version of Gerhard Ertl's book appeared.

### The Outlook

At present, seven LiC autobiographies exist in print and online, two of them in English (by Stephen Kent and Gerhard Ertl): altogether *ca.* 2,000 pages with *ca.* 1,000 figures and very interesting appendices. Manuscripts by Ryōji Noyori and Larry Overman have been accepted and will appear next spring. 10 further authors from all over the world are working to give deep insight in different cultures in the chemical sciences. Supporting material, videos, reviews as well as tweets about diverse chemical lives are found at [l-i-c.org](http://l-i-c.org)/[twitter.com/livesinchem](https://twitter.com/livesinchem). The LiC Advisory Board including Katharina Fromm, from Fribourg/Switzerland, is keen to hear your response to this project.

### Join the journey – Why Not

Award yourself and young chemists with copies – to create additional understanding for chemistry, chemists and the societies that we are being part of. Send your suggestions for future authors to:

- Katharina Fromm, Fribourg, CH
- Peter Göllitz, Weinheim
- Ralf Hahn, Berlin
- Henning Hopf, Braunschweig
- Martin Oestreich, Berlin
- Carsten Reinhardt, Bielefeld (Chair)
- Eva E. Wille, Weinheim

Received: July 24, 2023