



Ilya Harnik

Milton Harris

1906-1991

By Alfred E. Brown

MILTON HARRIS, chemist and retired vice-president for research at the Gillette Company, died of cancer on September 12, 1991, at the age of eighty-five.

Dr. Harris was born on March 21, 1906, in Los Angeles, California, but grew up in Portland, Oregon. He received a B.Sc. in 1926 at Oregon State University and then attended Yale University, where he received a Ph.D. in 1929.

The accomplishments of the ebullient Dr. Harris were legion. During his lifetime, he rendered outstanding service in five areas: pure and applied sciences, industrial research and development, professional society activities, government and public service, and academic activities. To these areas, Dr. Harris brought his enviable energy and optimism. In addition, many people sought his counsel.

His career began in 1931 as a research associate at the National Bureau of Standards, where his early work was in basic research. In 1938 as director of research of a textile industry research group, he moved into industrial research. Here, shrink-proof wool was developed for the Army and cited by the Army Quartermaster General as having saved the Army several hundred million dollars during World War II. Dr. Harris was also involved in engineering clothing for extreme climatic conditions, and he modified fabrics to make them selectively water repellent, flameproof, rot proof, radiation-resistant, and resistant to chemical warfare agents.

In 1945, at the end of the war, numerous industrial people who had worked with Dr. Harris suggested that he organize a consulting laboratory. He assembled a small group of scientists and founded Harris Research Laboratories. This was a very successful organization, which was acquired by the Gillette Company in 1956.

During his industrial research and development activities as vice-president for research at Gillette, many innovations took place, such as polymer-coated blades that dramatically reduced the cutting force in shaving and made obsolete all prior shaving systems. He was also involved in improving ballpoint writing products.

During these research years, Dr. Harris was very active in professional society activities. He became a member of the American Chemical Society (ACS) in 1931 and served there in various capacities before being named chairman of the board in 1966, a position he held for six years. He continued to serve the ACS until his death.

Dr. Harris was also active in many other scientific and professional societies, both inside and outside the United States. He was president of the American Institute of Chemists in 1960 and chairman of its board of directors. He served on numerous advisory boards such as those of *Science*, *Textile Research Journal*, and *the Journal of Polymer Science*. In addition to his government service in active research, Dr. Harris also served as chairman of the White House Committee on Civilian Technology in 1961-1962, as consultant to the White House Office of Science and Technology (1962-1965), and as a member of the President's Panel on the Environment (1968-1972).

Dr. Harris was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1976 and was a member of its Finance Committee for a six-year term beginning July 1987. He was active in the Panel of Jojoba and several other National Research Council (NRC) committees. He supported the NRC financially as a major benefactor for the Milton Harris Building at the NRC Georgetown facility.

Dr. Harris often spoke of the interrelationship among industry, government, and academia and of his activities in nurturing

this relationship. Milton gave his time, expertise, and wisdom to several universities, including his alma maters. In 1967 Oregon State honored him with the Oregon State University Distinguished Service Award. From 1961 to 1967 he was president of Yale Chemists' Association and active in several Yale bodies. For these contributions Yale conferred on him the Yale Medal and the Wilbur Lucius Cross Medal. Dr. Harris established chairs in chemistry at Yale and also the first chair in chemistry at Oregon State. In addition, he provided scholarships at both of these universities as well as at American University where he was active in the chemistry department.

Dr. Harris received numerous awards and other special recognition. He received the Priestley Medal, the highest award given by the American Chemical Society; the Washington Academy of Sciences Award; the Naval Ordnance Development Award; the Perkin Medal; the Honorary Fellow Award of the American Institute of Chemists; the Olney Medal; and the Harold DeWitt Smith Memorial Award.

Dr. Harris was a member of the Cosmos Club and the Chemists Club of New York. He was a prolific author, having published over two hundred scientific publications. He was also issued thirty-five patents.

I had a wonderful relationship with Milton Harris for forty-seven years, and I worked closely with him at Harris Research Laboratories in technical and other activities for twenty-one of those years. He was a most enthusiastic leader and had an unlimited capacity for friendship.

Finally, I do want to mention his great interest in advising and helping people. For career advice, scientific direction, or guidance in financial matters, he was always available. Above all else, Milton remained throughout his busy life a devoted family man. His wife of fifty-seven years, Carolyn, was ever the object of his solicitous concern, and he was a dear father of his two sons.