



Understanding the World through Chemistry

Kevin Wilks

My name is Kevin Wilks. I graduated BSc(Hons) from Sydney University in 1949 with honours in Organic Chemistry. This was one of the great achievements in my life, having picked up my studies after discharge from service as a pilot in the RAAF. It was the start to a great career, and the kind of starting point I can commend to anybody on the threshold of their own. Before I go into details, let me tell you that the Universe consists of matter in motion and the space it occupies. That means that chemistry, a knowledge of matter, is an essential prerequisite to the understanding of the world and the way it works. For instance, you will never fully understand DNA and the way it works without a knowledge of chemistry. Then there is atomic energy, solar energy, pharmaceuticals, biochemistry, biology, geology, agriculture etc. in all of which there are riveting interesting careers in research, in industrial applications and in management to be had. You are not locked into a career in chemistry - it opens the door to a huge range of jobs. There is a personality type related to the study of chemistry: If you are an introspective, self-reliant person with a love of classical music, mostly Bach and Mozart, prefer to work alone or in small teams, you would probably enjoy chemistry as your first love!

- NSW Division of Wood Technology, search for chemical constituents of Australian trees for possible therapeutic use. Alkaloids which are common in our trees frequently have therapeutic properties.
- Postgraduate research at Nottingham University, UK, continuing the search for useful chemical compounds in trees from other parts of the world.
- Deputy Chief Chemist, Reckitt & Colman, pharmaceuticals etc.
- Technical Manager, Cyanamid Australia, the production of surgical sutures from bovine raw materials
- Technical Manager, PGH Industries, controlling research into and the production of a wide variety of industrial clay products
- Works Manager, Michaelis Bayley, research into and production of all types of leather and leather finishes
- Director of the Australian Metric conversion Board which successfully converted us from old English measurements to the modern SI metric system. Considered by the US and others to have been the best-carried-out conversion in the world, leading to several invitations to visit and assist both Canada and the US. Made Honorary Citizen of Huntsville AL. for my contribution to the conversion of NASA. Met and was entertained by a Nazi rocket scientist, a side-kick to Werner von Braun, who had rained V2s on London during the war.
- Wrote the official history of Metrication In Australia.

Since retirement, have studied marine biology, archaeology with several visits to the Middle East, economics and written book *How The Economy Works*, a regular guest lecturer on economics to the U3A, University of the Third Age, for a lot of old guys who, having opened the knowledge window, can't get enough of it. OK?