

Prologue to an Interview by Diana Yates on Govindjee's Photosynthesis Museum

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Since Govindjee arrived at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in 1956, he has been conducting research at the cutting-edge of *life sciences* and, all the while, since 1961, he has fulfilled, wonderfully well, his outstanding teaching role at the UIUC in Plant Biology, Biophysics, and Biochemistry until he retired in 1999; he taught beginning undergraduates as well as the advanced graduates. His teaching skills are legendary, as he is both the professor of professors, and he is talented at engaging students of all levels in the life sciences. After his formal retirement, and after closing his research laboratory in 2002, he continued teaching around the World, particularly in China and India. Furthermore, his reach goes far beyond the classroom by making the connection to the heart and soul of the people behind the sciences (see e.g., Mohapatra and Singh, 2015; Jaiswal *et al.*, 2017 for his teaching style outdoors as well as indoors). During more than half a century, Govindjee has worked side-by-side with historically important figures, as his own discoveries soon shook the world of science, too. Who were these scientists and what was their source of inspiration? It is thus, that the world beats a path to his doorstep. That is, over time, thousands (from freshmen to Nobel laureates) have graced his office and laboratory on the UIUC campus, first in the basement of the Natural History Building (where Robert Emerson (b.1903-d.1959) and Eugene Rabinowitch (b.1898- d.1973) had their offices) — and later, on the 2nd and then on the 6th floor of Morrill Hall — it is as if they had stepped into a time machine. The pictures in the hallways leading to the

office and the museum pieces within have so many stories to tell and, with every visit, we learn something new about a scientist who was very much a good person. Indeed, when the UIUC Bulletin writer, Diana Yates, interviewed Govindjee in 2019, the story of his “Museum” may have been the centerpiece of a profile, but she also captured the kindness, generosity, and vivacity of the actual living treasure of the University of Illinois. With permission from the UIUC Bulletin, the wonderful piece written by Diana Yates is reproduced right after this ‘Prologue’, with photo credits to Fred Zwicky.

For more on Govindjee, I refer to a YouTube interview of Govindjee by Donald R. Ort at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOzuL0vxEi0> (Annual Reviews Conversations, 2011

www.annualreviews.org/page/audio) and to recent write-ups by Eaton- Rye *et al.* (2020); Stirbet *et al.* (2020); Block (2022) and Kumar *et al.* (2022), and even his own article on his 60-year Tryst in research (Govindjee, 2019). Yes, UIUC had recognized Govindjee in 1978 by giving him the “*Distinguished Lecturer*” Award in Life Sciences, and the ISPR (International Society of Photosynthesis Research) recognized him in 2007 with their ‘*Communication Award*’. For me, the best quote for Govindjee is from Eaton-Rye *et al.* (2012): “*Govindjee’s passion for photosynthesis has been inspirational for students and researchers for over 50 years. At the start of his 80th year, this volume of the Advances of Photosynthesis and Respiration series is*

dedicated to Govindjee to especially acknowledge not only his unique discoveries in Photosystem II, but also his commitment to educating students and researchers throughout the World.” In the same vein, the Dedication added, *“His unparalleled commitment and knowledge have made him a true advocate and ambassador of photosynthetic research and education around the World.”* I find it quite coincidental that in 2012, the School of Integrative Biology (SIB) of UIUC used the title of “Mister Photosynthesis” for him!

Happy 90th Birthday, Govindjee!

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