

OMCOS 8

Santa Barbara  
1995

## OMCOS 8, Santa Barbara, August 6-10, 1995

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### Ambushed in Firenze

It was during the summer of 1989, lunchtime at OMCOS 5 in beautiful Florence. En route to the indicated location to yet again sample fabulous Italian cuisine, I was met by Ei-ichi Negishi. He asked, seemingly out of the blue, if I would be willing to consider organizing an OMCOS meeting in Santa Barbara. My immediate response, given with absolutely total naïveté, was "sure." I was then re-directed to a different location where the International Organizing Committee was meeting to have lunch...and to discuss the idea of having OMCOS 8 in Santa Barbara.

The Chairman of OMCOS 5, Alfredo Ricci, ran this meeting with his usual charm and grace, offering comments about the current OMCOS and, as I would soon learn all-too-well, the next OMCOS meeting, OMCOS 6, would be in Utrecht, to be run by Gerard van Koten, and then OMCOS 7 to be held in Kobe under the supervision of Shun-ichi Murahashi. So I sat among this distinguished group of former and future Chairs of OM-

COS meetings, wondering what might be said about OMCOS 8. It was six years away, so I figured it would only be mentioned in passing, and that Santa Barbara was likely to be only one of perhaps several venues under consideration. Wrong.

After a brief update by Shun-ichi, Alfredo thanked him, and then looked at me and said: "So, Bruce, would you like to tell us about your plans for holding OMCOS 8 in Santa Barbara?" As I looked around the room, it seemed as though everyone was anticipating my pitch for OMCOS to go to southern California. But I had nothing to show; no slides, no pictures, no information on hotels, a conference room, poster locations, local tours, ...nada; zilch. But what I did have to my credit is the reputation of Santa Barbara as a vacation spot; indeed, those at the table, as I came to quickly see, not only knew about my home town, they had already decided that regardless of what I had to say, OMCOS 8 was going to be held in Santa Barbara in 1995. And so it went, I spoke for maybe five minutes, after which it was agreed that I, along with Ei-ichi Negishi as co-Chair, would be responsible for this international event.

### Flying Solo at UC Santa Barbara

Although OMCOS 8 was six years in the future, planning such a huge event, in fact, took years of lead time. Securing a room to hold up to a thousand attendees over the summer was not trivial, even in a town known for tourism. Since the largest lecture theater at UCSB, Campbell Hall, holds 800, I figured it was time to go shopping downtown. Fortunately, I was also aware of Conference Services on campus, and after several meetings with their staff, it was agreed that they would oversee this event. Their eyes lit up when I suggested that the number expected is somewhere between 600 and 1000. It seems that this would translate into the second largest conference ever to be held in Santa Barbara. With such anticipated notoriety, I had to ask Sally Vito, the liaison person assigned by Conference Services to oversee OMCOS 8, what was the largest meeting that brought over 1000 attendees to Santa Barbara? Answer: trading baseball cards!



Steve Brown  
(Artworks at UCSB)

What came out of these meetings with Conference Services was the conclusion that there is only one place in Santa Barbara that could accommodate all the needs of an OMCOS meeting: Fess Parker's Red Lion Inn (so named at that time, after Fess Parker, a TV personality who played Davy Crockett and later, Daniel Boone; today, it's the Doubletree Resort). With its stunning location on the beach in the downtown area, and close proximity to the wharf, it appeared to virtually guarantee a memorable experience for every attendee. So very early in the game a deal was struck to locate OMCOS 8 at this beautiful site.



Sally Vito (Conference Services)



George Rubottom (U.S. NSF)



Lunches at Fess Parker's



The view from the balcony at the hotel

In between the time of OMCOS 5 and OMCOS 8, of course, were both OMCOS 6 and 7 in Utrecht in 1991, and then Kobe, in the summer of 1993. While attendance at OMCOS 6 in The Netherlands taught me a great deal about the details of organizing a conference for hundreds, the meeting chaired by Shun-ichi Murahashi scared me. It was flawless; hugely successful in every respect: >1000 participants, a grandiose hotel setting, and the hospitality for which the Japanese are world famous. At the conference banquet I was asked to say a few words, given that I would be the Chair of the next meeting two years hence. All that came to mind was that I was in trouble; deep trouble, as following the Japanese was not an enviable position to be in, and so I made it clear that Ei-ichi and I would do our best to live up to the exceptional standard that had now been set for future OMCOS meetings. I went home humbled by what I saw in Kobe.

Planning on the scientific program also started fairly early, but here I was fortunate to have a future Nobel Laureate working with me on such matters. Ei-ichi and I carefully examined the areas of interest in organometallics that needed to be covered, and the likely speakers who would continue to be in demand a few years from the planning and invitation stage. Importantly, we strived to gain international representation, fully aware that terrific chemistry was being done in all corners of the world. Or to paraphrase this task in somewhat less diplomatically correct lingo: we paid attention to the politics of speaker selection!

One of the “facts of life” associated with organizing any meeting is the need to raise outside funding. Without this, registration fees would be too high and the risk of pricing the meeting beyond the means of many becomes real. At an early stage, the fee was set at a very reasonable \$375, and in return for this I was determined to bring to the attendees as much as possible: a Book of Abstracts, all lunches, and a Day-1 mixer with food & drink included. Fortunately, although numerous companies contributed modest sums that were greatly appreciated and all added up, it was ultimately a “healthy” contribution from Ichiro Shinkai at Merck that made a huge difference in how I was able to plan for this meeting.

Also a major consideration at OMCOS meetings is attendance by students at all stages of their education. Traditionally, significantly lower registration fees would be set for them, although travel costs were still an obstacle. How would these costs be subsidized? Fortunately, I had a sympathetic ear at the National Science Foundation (NSF), belonging to the then long time Program Officer and former professor George Rubottom, senior author of the well-known “Rubottom oxidation” discovered while he was on the faculty at the University of Puerto Rico. Remarkably, the NSF had a program for funding aimed at providing travel support for students to attend such meetings, and it was only through the generosity of this U.S. government organization that I was able to bring between 10 and 20 young people to this otherwise relatively costly event.

As the scientific program took shape, Sally began to make proposals for the social program: the conference banquet, an evening for a dinner outside taking advantage of the perfect weather common to Santa Barbara in August, a speaker’s dinner, a tour of the gardens at Lotusland in the adjacent village of Montecito, and a program for accompanying persons. Although I had lived in the area for over a dozen years, these attractions, quite honestly, would be just as new to me as they would be to those attending OMCOS 8!



Speakers tour of Lotusland

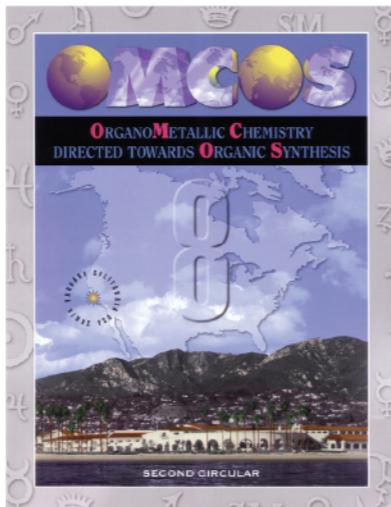
Part of the process of bringing such a meeting to the attention of the world is to find ways to advertise, since the number of meetings during the summer months worldwide is rather large. In the U.S. alone, I was facing competition from the ACS national meeting, many local section meetings, and perhaps the main attraction: the Gordon Research Conferences. Ei-ichi and I had put together a truly first rate program of plenary and invited speakers, but we needed to get the word out. Typically, former Chairmen

had commissioned beautiful posters to be sent throughout the globe. This seemed like a good idea, since the natural beauty of the Santa Barbara area could be highlighted as a backdrop. In hindsight, it's almost hard to recall what my thinking was exactly, since back in 1994, there was no internet! Even email exchanges were infrequent. A poster would have to do.

The obvious person to make this happen was the graphics master on campus: Steve Brown. After presenting my case, which included offering him an all expenses paid opportunity to hobnob with organic chemists at the conference banquet, he agreed to create the poster. What a deal. He even agreed to prepare the 1st and 2nd Circulars needed for registration and submission of Abstracts for talks and posters; all done gratis.



Poster created for OMCOS 8



Second of two Circulars

### The Meeting

With the infrastructure in place thanks to Sally, and a local team in the form of graduate students from my group ready to pitch in wherever needed, we could only wait for our guests to show up; ca. 650 of them, plus accompanying persons. The opening event was a conference mixer in the courtyard of the Red Lion Hotel, facing the Pacific, where I had arranged for the new Chancellor of UCSB, Henry Yang, to greet conferees. Also brought to Santa Barbara for this occasion was Herb Brown as a special invited speaker at the banquet. Interestingly, Henry had just been recruited from Purdue, and so between the Yang's, the Brown's, and the Negishi's (vide infra), suffice it to say that Purdue University was very well represented at OMCOS 8.



the Purdue connection:  
H. C. Brown & UCSB Chancellor Henry Yang

Although the list of speakers, as illustrated on the poster, was impressive, it turned out not to accurately reflect those who ended up actually giving talks at this meeting. That is, two weeks before the start of OMCOS 8, Dave Evans called me, starting the conversation with "Hi Bruce...I'm about to make your life miserable." Unfortunately, Dave would not be able to give his lecture, leaving me with an opening for a plenary speaker at this late date. I immediately called Barry Sharpless, hoping that I might catch him given the proximity to San Diego (i.e., ca. a four hour drive to Santa Barbara). I also called Scott Denmark, and miraculously, both agreed to come to Santa Barbara. Yeah, I know. I lucked out.

So with an air of southern California living permeating the meeting, and great science virtually guaranteed, there was little to do but

enjoy the moment. Not unexpectedly, there were many unforeseen occurrences during these five days of OMCOS 8 with which, sometimes, a Chairman just has to deal. For example, there were a few last minute attendees who arrived with no hotel reservations in place. There were T-shirts created specifically for OMCOS 8 as memorabilia that needed to be sold, but by whom? So on the fly I enlisted my 14-year old daughter, Abbey, to stand behind the counter. Of course, no teenage daughter does anything like this for free...so I took a 10% loss for her commission! And then there was the conference banquet, where Sally and I arranged to have Hawaiian dancers perform as part of the program. I had no idea that I would end on stage shaking my booty! Thank God that in 1995 there was no such thing as Facebook.



OMCOS 8 T-shirts sold at the meeting



Hawaiian dancing at the Conference Banquet

Another story, totally unexpected and known to very few, focuses on the aftermath of the speaker's dinner, a gathering of some 80 people that took place at the restaurant of the magnificent El Encanto Hotel on the "Riviera" section of Santa Barbara looking down over the city towards the ocean. For this event, I had lined up (at that time) the owner of the Sanford Winery, Richard Sanford, who agreed not only to supply his wines at cost, but to give a talk at this affair about his products. Richard also took the initiative to match each of the wines selected to each course of the meal; well, that was quite a memorable evening. However, after seeing all the guests out and seemingly paying the tab, I was walking to my car when a waiter

came running after me into the parking lot. I wondered if my credit card, in fact, had been declined, or if there had been some additional expenses that had been saved for my attention in the absence of my guests. Thus, I was truly relieved when the waiter said: "Excuse me, but you have four of the eight cases of your Sanford wine left over. What should I do with these?" At this point the native New Yorker in me kicked in: "I'll back the car up; put 'em in da trunk."

As is the case at every OMCOS meeting, the torch is passed on to the next Chair, in this case, to the Chair of OMCOS 9, Armin de Meijere. The next meeting, in 1997, therefore, was announced and would be held in Göttingen, Germany. It seemed, judging from his smiles at the Banquet, that Armin was looking forward to bringing the international community working on organometallic chemistry directed towards organic synthesis back to Europe.



The next Chair of OMCOS, Armin de Meijere, flanked to his right by the Murahashi's, and left by the Negishi's

So as the meeting ended, I chatted briefly with Shun-ichi Murahashi, seeking his counsel as to what to expect, post-OMCOS 8. What he told me I found very surprising at the time. He said that the stress of organizing such a large and important meeting was far more than I might imagine; that it would take a year for me to normalize. A year?! Well, he was absolutely right.

In the final analysis, it was a once-in-a-lifetime event; both Ei-ichi and I remain truly honored to have co-organized an OMCOS

meeting. But while the meeting was officially over, it would be some time before all outstanding invoices would be received and then, somehow, had to be paid. A few weeks later, the final bills came in from Sally for all the social events, and of course, the fees from Conference Services. I had absolutely no idea how much these would be and how much funding remained available. When I opened the envelope and saw that we were within a thousand dollars of the total, in the black, then and only then...for me, ...was OMCOS 8 over.