

GIFTED LIVES: EARLY LITERARY EXPERIENCES OF HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED  
ADULTS

WHAT LITERARY EXPERIENCES INFLUENCED YOU TO BECOME A SCIENTIST?? EXPLAIN.

Paul de Kruif's biographies; Arrowsmith  
Jaffe- Crucibles

WHAT BOOKS INFLUENCED YOU MOST DURING CHILDHOOD, AND HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN  
YOU READ THEM?

above. Age 6 or 7 on.

textbooks of math., chemistry; biochemistry  
science fiction and fairy tales (sic)

WAS THERE A KEY PERSON ~~WHY IMMEDIATE CHARACTER~~ WHO INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER  
CHOICE OR SCIENTIFIC LIFE?

Stuyvesant High School

Professor F J Ryan at Columbia University

WHAT BOOKS DID YOU REREAD DURING CHILDHOOD? WHAT BOOKS AND/OR AUTHORS  
DO YOU REREAD NOW? PLEASE ELABORATE.

de Kruif

Science of Life -- Wells Huxley and Wells (as child)

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Reread today? Tolstoi? T S Eliot? Don't often re-read

Iris Murdoch

IF YOU ARE WILLING TO BE QUOTED BY NAME, PLEASE WRITE YOUR NAME, TITLE,  
ADDRESS AND TODAY'S DATE. THANK YOU.

I can send you documentary material if you wish.

**Dr. Joshua Lederberg**  
**President**  
**Rockefeller University**  
**New York, NY 10021**

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Dorothy A. Stracher, Ph.D.

The pivot of my account is September 1941, when I enrolled as an entering undergraduate at Columbia College in New York City. My earlier education was framed by the New York City public school system: especially by the cadre of devoted and sympathetic teachers who went far beyond their duty in encouraging a precocious youngster whose demands they could not always meet from their own knowledge, and the "elitist" high school system as represented by Stuyvesant High School - open by competitive examination to students with a bent for science and technology. Even more important perhaps was the local Washington Heights branch of the Carnegie-New York public library system. These institutions symbolized and embodied the melting pot ideology.

My earliest recollections aver an unswerving interest in science, as the means by which man could strive for an understanding of his origin, setting and purpose, and for power to forestall his natural fate of hunger, disease and death. This was reinforced by the role of Albert Einstein and Chaim Weizmann as culture heroes - heroes whose secular achievements my parents and I could understand and appreciate.

The library was my university as I went through grade school and junior high school. My most prized Bar-Mitzvah present was a copy of Bodansky's "Introduction of Physiological Chemistry". { 7 } I had already devoured Bodansky at the local library along with hundreds of other works in the sciences, mathematics, history, philosophy and fiction. Books by Jeans, Eddington and especially Wells, Huxley and Wells' encyclopedic 'The Science of Life' were the most influential sources of my perspective on biology and man's place in the cosmos, seen as evolutionary drama.

Stuyvesant High School offered unusual opportunities for practical work in machine shops and analytical laboratories as well as straight classroom teaching.

Having begged for and been granted access to the Cooper Union Library (near Stuyvesant), I had also read many research papers - but neither these, nor my teachers could really say much of the life of the scientist at work.

Playing at research in high school and then for some months at the American Institute's Science Laboratory (a predecessor of the Westinghouse Science Search) did focus my interests in chemical cytology; and I entered Columbia with the idea of learning the chemistry of cellular components so as "to bring the power of chemical analysis to the secrets of life". I looked forward to a career in medical research where such advances could be applied to problems like cancer and the malfunctions of the brain.

My curriculum at Columbia was somewhat unconventional. As soon as a dubious bureaucracy would permit, I registered in a number of graduate courses in the Department of Zoology. Not until my last term had I matured enough to seek and profit from a rounding of my humanistic education at the hands of teachers like Lionel Trilling and James Gutman.

I first met Francis Ryan in September 1942, when he returned from his postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University with E. L. Tatum to become an instructor in Zoology. He brought back the new science of Neurospora biochemical genetics and a gift of inspired teaching that was to be a decisive turning point in my own career. I had little or no contact with him in formal courses, but by January 1943 I was working in his laboratory assisting in the preparation of media and handling of Neurospora cultures. For the first time I was able to observe significant research as it was unfolding and to engage in recurrent discussions with Francis - and with an ever widening group of graduate students in the department - about Neurospora, life, and science.

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