

Alan Preston

I was born in June 1948 and grew up in Takapuna on the North Shore in Auckland, New Zealand, back in the days before the Auckland Harbour Bridge opened in 1959. Mum was a homemaker and Dad the Primary School headmaster. We lived within the school grounds in what was



one of the last urban school houses in NZ. We were a “late” family, mum was 37 and dad 48 at the time of my birth, the youngest of 3 kids to my sister Mary and brother Bill. Life was simple



and our needs few. School was ever present, as was [Takapuna beach](#) nearby. Being a slow runner and lousy at rugby or anything gymnastic felt awkward, but at 9 years old I was taught golf by an uncle. For the next 5 years I played as often as 5 times a week, and in a way I found myself from this sport and

also learned much about human behavior. Following five mostly uneventful years at [Takapuna Grammar School](#) (alumni include [Peter Blake](#) and [Lorde](#)) I attended the University of Auckland and majored in chemistry, and after graduating with a BSc, obtained MSc and PhD degrees in organic synthesis with diterpenoids. Upon completion of my PhD we headed to [UBC](#) in Vancouver for two years of post-doc in steroidal alkaloid synthesis.



After my BSc I really didn't know what I wanted to do but figured research might be of interest even though I had no idea what it involved. I explained this to [Prof Conrad Cambie](#) when I went to ask if I might join his program, and he said “don't worry about that, I am here to teach you” and handed me a sheet of diterpenoid reaction schemes to work on that looked to me like complete gobbledygook. I rapidly fell in love with research in general and organic synthesis in particular. It was at grad school that I developed a belief in the desirability of running multiple parallel research projects, something that continued throughout my career. During those times I was lucky to survive an organic peroxide explosion arising from a side reaction in a sequence by my lab mate and now wood protection business leader and IRG supporter [Murray Nancekivell](#), as well as later with my stupidity in using 90% hydrogen peroxide multiple times in a reaction I chose to use while at UBC.

In early October 1974, nine days after Kent's birth, Lesley and I headed back from Vancouver to



NZ, with no job and only one possibility. In the interview for the position of “Research Scientist” in the wood preservation group at the Forest Research Institute (currently “Scion”) in [Rotorua](#), for which I was recommended by [Terry Fullerton](#), my first lab mate at grad school, the only two real questions seemed to be “I hear you play golf” and “I understand you're not a teetotaler”. In those days

FRI was part of the NZ government, but strangely the position was neither advertized nor notified. Anyway, in spite of having been turned off research by dubious R&D management at

UBC, I took to wood protection research at FRI like a duck to water, even though knowing that at 26 years old my career in organic synthesis was likely over. We were allowed by our group leader [Sandy McQuire](#) and our division director Roy Orman to pursue pretty much any idea that came to mind involving wood protection. I headed off, more than ably supported by my ever patient technician [Colleen Chittenden](#), into the realm of new preservatives and clear wood coatings developments. We worked closely with biologists John Butcher (who was supported by Jeanette Drysdale), Mick Hedley, and David Cross, with Sandy being in charge of the treatments and all other aspects of the group. Out of the preservation research, among other things arose AAC and the formative work that became ACQ elsewhere. In my view our biggest mistake at that time was not testing for the disparate hazards within above ground applications, which eventually led to my career long interest in test method development, and the use of climate indices for choice of accelerated field test sites. Over time I also came to appreciate the value of partaking in observational science at test sites in regards to how treatments and materials actually perform in a variety of soils, exposures and climates.

In 1979 [Michigan Tech University](#) in Houghton provided a sabbatical to work alongside [Darrel Nicholas](#) at the Institute of Wood Research (IWR) in what was known as the EPRI project on new preservatives for poles. After returning to FRI in 1980 IWR offered the position of Asst Director and I took up this position later in 1981. I became Director of IWR in 1984 and was able to hire several remarkable scientists, including Bob Palardy and Peter Laks, while [Vincent Chiang](#) went on to a stellar career. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that running a university institute in wood products with only 25% hard funding and the usual overhead requirements was “challenging”.

Late in 1986 came the move to Charlotte, NC to put together a research program in wood protection for Chemical Specialties, Inc (CSI), which then was a subsidiary of Laporte, a UK chemical company. I was given free rein, within the allotted budget, by our CEO Steve



Ainscough to pursue whatever research avenue and scientific personnel I chose. This was a time of incredible opportunity, challenging creative work and fun. The other scientists in the research group over the years, at various times, included Dave Fowlie, Paul Walcheski, Andy Zahora, Kevin Archer, Lehong Jin, Dave Roberts, Tony Bergervoet, Futong Cui, Cheney

Vidrine, and Christoph Schauwecker, and this mix was intentionally skewed towards providing a preponderance of chemists. Monthly group meetings were frequently “contentious” as we tried to achieve a form of consensus on approaches to the multitudinous projects. After almost 26 years in this position, in 2012 retirement arrived, by which time CSI had long since morphed into the joint venture known as Viance. We achieved many things both product- and science-wise, but lingering regrets continue within me over the developments



that didn't see the light of day, and the struggle within wood protection globally to develop and market durability and performance attributes in a meaningful way for the betterment of the industry, consumers, and for a sustainable world.

IRG first became known to me after joining FRI in 1974, and the first meeting I attended was IRG11 in Raleigh in 1980. Over the years I tried to attend as many meetings as feasible, and encouraged my research group to do so as well, with the understanding that attending also meant writing a paper for presentation. Following the [murder](#) of IRG VP Jeff LaFage in 1989, I became Chair of the IRG24 LOC in Florida - working jointly with [Bill](#)

[McNamara](#) who was LOC FC. I also chaired the Costa Rica IRG regional meeting in 2008, as well as being LOC Finance Chair for IRG31, IRG38 and IRG45, working with LOC Chairs Jeff Morrell, Rich Ziobro and Mark Manning, respectively. I had the privilege to serve as IRG Finance Chair



for 12 years and then IRG Communications Chair for 10 years during the period 1996-2018. I believe that IRG provides a forum like no other in our field, and that its voluntary core needs to be nurtured and fed by all of us who participate. I also believe that industry has a treasure



trove of information, much of which need not be considered proprietary, and that can and should be brought forth within the IRG for the benefit of all participants in wood protection, and especially for the industry itself. It goes without saying that over the years IRG also introduced me to an ever-changing cast of many interesting and innovative people, which has colored my world in so many positive ways, and I am grateful to the people I have met and the friends I have made.

These days Barbie and I live happily at [our home](#) on the northern Sonoma County, California coast in the somewhat remote location of [Sea Ranch](#). The nearest city is Santa Rosa, a nearly 2 hours drive down [Highway 1](#), so much of our shopping is online – as was the case when we built the house back in 2003, with much of the construction carried out by Kent and Ben. Most days we walk 8 to 10 km along the ocean bluffs, and spend much time working around the house and garden. We also get to enjoy the ever-changing [sunsets](#) over the Pacific. The climate here is about as mild as it gets in the US, and because of the similarity to parts of NZ, many of the plants that thrive in our garden are NZ natives. We both like to cook and enjoy wine, and music is a constant throughout the house. Our musical tastes are pretty much just rock, with Barbie



leaning towards the Foo Fighters, Rammstein and AC/DC while I am more into Pearl Jam and Midnight Oil. Our choices in internet radio include a variety of stations in Sweden, Germany and New Zealand and I get my NZ nostalgia fix listening to the morning show from Auckland. Golf is on the schedule occasionally, and so far the [capabilities](#) are still mostly there, even though the childhood obsession is long gone. The days of running, squash and skiing are long in the rearview mirror given my two hip replacements.

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Family ties are paramount for Barbie and me, her boys Erik and Scott both live in the Raleigh/Durham area of North Carolina and are married to Heather and Casey, respectively, with 2 kids each. My sons Kent and Ben (married to Michele) both live high up in the Rockies in the small



town of [Crested Butte, Colorado](#). We travel back East a couple of times each year for a few days to see the grandkids, and usually take a trip during summer to Crested Butte. Any vacations we take are typically to warm beaches in Costa Rica, or in New Zealand or other Pacific islands. And, hopefully, we'll make at least a few more IRG meetings.

Life is short but to quote [Just Breathe](#): "I'm a lucky man to count on both hands the ones I love....."