

THE ADVENTURES OF MEG A. MOLE FUTURE CHEMIST



FEATURED CHEMIST:

DR. ERIK SORESENSEN

I made my NCW '08 journey all the way to Princeton University! I met a scientist there who enjoyed cross country running in high school and is now working hard to create molecules that will be helpful in treating diseases. Dr. Erik Sorensen, a synthetic chemist, was kind enough to invite me to spend the day with him at Princeton.

Dr. Sorensen's laboratory focuses on mixing chemicals together to try to create ones that are the same as those found in nature. Some of the molecules that they are trying to create are those that are found in bacteria, trees, the ocean, etc. The molecules he is most interested in are those that might be useful for treating diseases.

Aside from working in the laboratory, Dr. Sorensen spends a lot of time in his office and at the library. I was able to visit some of the wonderful libraries at Princeton during my trip.

When asked what he liked most about his job, Dr. Sorensen told me he enjoyed the

opportunity and freedom to generate ideas about chemistry and then seeing if those ideas can be realized. Also, he really enjoys contributing to the



I watched carefully as Dr. Sorensen prepared a solution in his laboratory.

chemical education of young students and being around them when they do their own discoveries.

One of Dr. Sorensen's high school students placed 2nd in the Westinghouse [now Intel] science contest! He said it is very satisfying when they go off and get good jobs, etc.

When kids take medicine, they should think about how it was created or discovered. Dr. Sorensen has been very successful in his research career. One interesting project he was a part of while he was in graduate school was being part of a team that synthesized a drug called Taxol. Taxol is effective for several types of cancer and has saved many lives. Dr. Sorensen and his team were the first to synthesize it, and there was lots of media coverage. Now it is made semi-synthetically from a renewable sources. The source is in the needles of a tree related to the original tree species in which Taxol was found.



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Although a highly successful chemist, Dr. Sorensen did not find his interest in the sciences early on. His favorite pastimes included drumming and cross country running, and he did not find his passion for chemistry until his college years. Dr. Sorensen told me he had a fantastic teacher during his junior year in college. It was then that he became fascinated by the world of chemical reactivity and the three-dimensional nature of molecules.

To read more about Dr. Sorensen's research, a full article is available at: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/6o5k7t>



Dr. Sorensen and I took a break to pose for a quick photo.

Did You Know?

A *synthetic chemist* makes molecules from smaller ones that already exist.



Personal Profile: Dr. Erik Sorensen

Favorite food? My mom's macaroni and cheese

When is your birthday? December 27th

Favorite Pastime? Drumming and running

What is an accomplishment you are proud of? My students and their accomplishments

About your family? I'm married (to a chemist) and have a 3-year-old daughter



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