

Banquet Speech

Rita Levi-Montalcini's speech at the Nobel Banquet, December 10, 1986

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with very deep emotion that my dear friend Stanley Cohen and I stand here today, in front of you, and wish to express our immense gratitude for having been bestowed with the greatest honor that a scientist can ever dream of receiving for his or her accomplishments: the Nobel Prize.

Stanley and I first began to work together thirty-three years ago in the Department of Zoology of the Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, chaired at that time by Prof. Viktor Hamburger, a leading scientist in Experimental Neuroembryology, a great scholar and a most beloved master and friend. Since then, we enjoyed every minute of this adventure which was to lead us to Stockholm.

Stanley's exceptional talent and most rigorous training in biochemistry, and my own training in neurology, which I had the privilege of receiving from the famous Italian scientist, the late Giuseppe Levi, at the Medical School of the University of Turin, provided us with an ideal complementary background to tackle what at first seemed a fairly easy puzzle to solve: namely, to uncover the nature and mechanism of action of a protein molecule which became known, on account of its biological properties, as the "Nerve Growth Factor". It took, however, more than three decades to realize the complexity of the problem which is at present still under intensive investigation all over the world.

I wish to add that while Stanley devoted from 1961 to the present day all his skill and expertise in exploring another growth factor, the Epidermal Growth Factor, in the Department of Biochemistry of the University in Nashville, Tennessee, I was most fortunate to be joined twenty years ago by Prof. Pietro Calissano and Luigi Aloe, two outstanding investigators and dearest friends, who worked daily with me or independently, and to whom goes most of the merit for the success in our recent studies of the Nerve Growth Factor.

As far as I am concerned, I must add that the Nerve Growth Factor would perhaps never have been discovered were it not for the rigorous neurobiological training which I received in my native country, at the University of Turin, and of the most generous hospitality and invaluable scientific and technical help which I received at Washington University, where I spent the thirty happiest and most productive years of my life.

To our Swedish colleagues and dear friends, I wish to express my everlasting gratitude for their fundamental contributions in the field of Neurosciences. To them we all are indebted for having opened the gates of the golden era in the field of neurobiology, and I

personally feel, even more than anybody else, thankful for their outstanding work in the area of the Nerve Growth Factor.

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