



“Physics in Canada”
Book Review

“La Physique au Canada”
Critique de livre

Lucky Hazards: My Life in Physics by Myer Bloom, Isss Press (2014), ISBN-10 0993853919, price \$37.78.

“My life in physics” are the personal recollections of a Canadian physicist who was a pioneer in the field of Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR). Myer Bloom as a UBC professor of physics has become known as the father of biological physics in Canada, pioneering the use of NMR to biological membranes and training numerous scientists in the technique. He has inspired the field both experimentally and theoretically for decades. Myer Bloom was tireless, sociable with an infectious love of research. He loved human interactions, hosting guests and students usually in Chinatown around those typical large round tables. I still have fond memories of such an event although it happened decades ago. Myer Bloom came to the Department of Physics at UBC in 1957. His work there and at universities in Leyden, Harvard, Kyoto, Paris, Sydney, Rome and Denmark explored the molecular properties of matter using NMR. Bloom retired in 1993, but continued for a number of years to make significant contributions to NMR on soft tissue structures. “Lucky Hazards” as a recollection of his personal and scientific life touched me particularly as it brought to life milieus that I have either heard of or have lived in. He was raised in Montreal in the eastern part of downtown and went to Baron Byng High School which trained many notorious Montrealers and personalities (Irving Layton, Mordecai Richtler) including a number of physicists (for instance Eli Yablonovich, Tommy Marks, and Myer Bloom, the ones I know about). My father taught at Baron Byng Latin and French for a few years before embarking on a career in philosophy at Concordia (Eli Yablonovich had found memories of his teaching). Myer Bloom did his undergraduate studies at McGill at the end of the war, and then went to the University of Illinois Champaign whose “physics department ... was the best in the world” at the time in his assessment, with a number of notorious faculty members including John Bardeen, Charlie Slichter (his supervisor) Fred Seitz, Francis Loomis, and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar who arrived while Myer was a student.

The book will provide deep satisfaction to those who knew Myer and to any physicist familiar with postwar science or curious about it. Myer Bloom maintained a wide breadth of interest in physics so his interactions went well beyond his fields of research. He had contacts with an impressive number of physicists. Myer Bloom explains scientific issues and progress very clearly but unavoidably in a language appropriate to physicists. It really helps to have a training in physics to appreciate his story. I profoundly enjoyed reading his memoirs and seeing him bring to life very interesting science beyond the subjects usually covered in historical monographs.

Béla Joós

Professor, Department of Physics, University of Ottawa