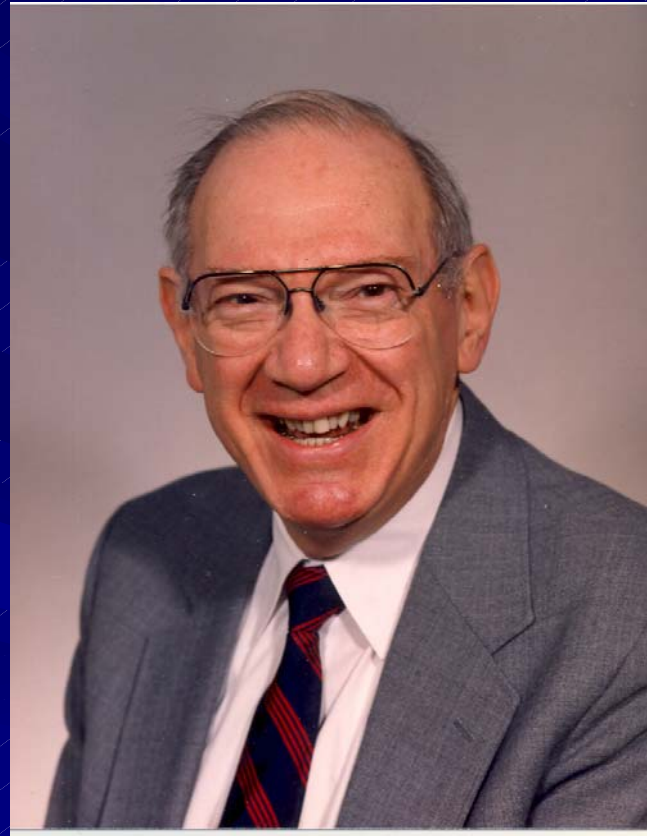


# A Tribute to Milt Gordon\*



NIEHS Superfund Basic Research Program  
New York City, 2006

\*With special thanks to Milt's wife of 48 years, Sunnie, for her detailed account of Milt's life and career. See: <http://depts.washington.edu/biowww/miltongordon/career.pdf>

# IN the beginning....

- Born in 1930, St. Paul, MN
- Youngest of 3 children
- “Being born during the Depression laid the foundation of values, work ethics, and ambition that remained with Milt throughout his life”



MILT GORDON, AGES 4 AND 6  
(ST. PAUL, 1934 AND 1936)  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

# The Son of Eastern Europe Immigrants

“Milt struggled in his early school years because English was not his first language. His mother spoke Yiddish, and when Milt went to kindergarten, he did not know the English words to ask to go to the bathroom.”



# Beginnings of a young scientist

- “Milt discovered a series of books in the school library: *The Earth for Sam*, *Biology for Sam*, and *Astronomy for Sam*. These books stirred Milt’s interest in science and presaged his future career. In the sixth through eighth grades from 1939 to 1941, Milt was engrossed in comic books, *Buck Rogers*, *Flash Gordon*, and *Planet Stories*. Milt developed a passion for science fiction and further pursued this genre by reading pulp magazines *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*, renamed *Analog*”

# Early Evidence of a Green Thumb

- “St. Paul summers were fertile and beautiful. Days were hot and nights stayed warm and summer rains nourished the soil. An apple and a plum tree and tomato plants flourished in the backyard.”
- “He planted Yellow Pear Tomatoes that grew so tall he had to stand on a ladder to harvest them.”

# His generosity and kind spirit started at a young age

- Milt saved his money in a cigar box for college, but when the family could not afford his brother's college tuition, Milt donated his savings of \$40 to pay the fees. "This represented a lot of work," Milt said, "but I was proud to contribute."



# The college years

- 1947-50 University of Minnesota, BA in Chemistry (in 3 years)
- 1950-53 – University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign
- Nearly drafted into the army in 1951– but worked on a ‘toxicology’ project relevant to Army (red tide toxin)
- Met his wife in 1951
- Finished his PhD in 3 years- age 23:
  - *The Metabolism of Myo-Inositol, a vitamin, by a Mutant Strain of Pseudomonas Fluorescens.*

# Post graduate training

- 1953-57 NCI Post doctoral fellow, Sloan-Kettering, NYC
- 1957-59, joined Nobelist Wendell Stanley's lab at UC-Berkeley
  - *“Work on whatever you want, as long as you're the best in the world. . . . Otherwise you are out!”*
- Began his work on tobacco mosaic virus



**GEORGE BROWN, PROJECT  
MANAGER, AND  
MILT (SLOAN-KETTERING,  
NEW YORK CITY, 1957)**



# Recruited to the UW

- Joined Biochemistry Faculty at UW in 1959
  - Hired by Hans Neurath, a Nobel Laureate
- Became the UW's only 'state-of-the-art' tobacco farmer



**MILT'S PLANT GROWTH ROOM FOR PHYTOREMEDIATION RESEARCH (GRILL WORKTABLES A HAND-SPRINKLER, METALLIC WALL COVERINGS, AND CEILING LIGHTS) UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, BASEMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES BUILDING**

# Distinguished Career at UW

- Editor of *Biochemistry* 1960-1982 (established by Hans Neurath and Milt in 1960)
- Dedicated teacher – WWAMI Biochemistry courses
- Taught and mentored 4 generations of graduate and medical students



# The ultimate educator

- Supervised 52 students and post-doctoral fellows
- Taught biochemistry to undergrads, grad and med students for 49 yrs
  - “The foxy old fart is a damn good teacher.”



# The beginnings of 'phytoremediation'

“In the mid-1980s, Milt visited his brother, Irving Gordon, an organic chemist, then manager in Corporate Research at Occidental Chemical Corporation, located near Irving's home in Niagara Falls. They discussed cleaning up chemical spills using bacteria. Bacterial cleanup of this nature had little public acceptance. The brothers brainstormed. Rather than releasing the bacteria, they spoke about incorporating bacterial enzymes into plants.”



# “Pulling up pollution by the roots”

- Joined the UW NIEHS SBRP program in its early days (1986)
- Continued through several successful renewals (and a nearly unsuccessful one - Bill Suk remembers)
  - Collaborators Stuart Strand and Lee Newman
- Always a solid contributor – always on time with his progress reports!
- In 1997, at age 67, began a new company to provide phytoremediation to companies



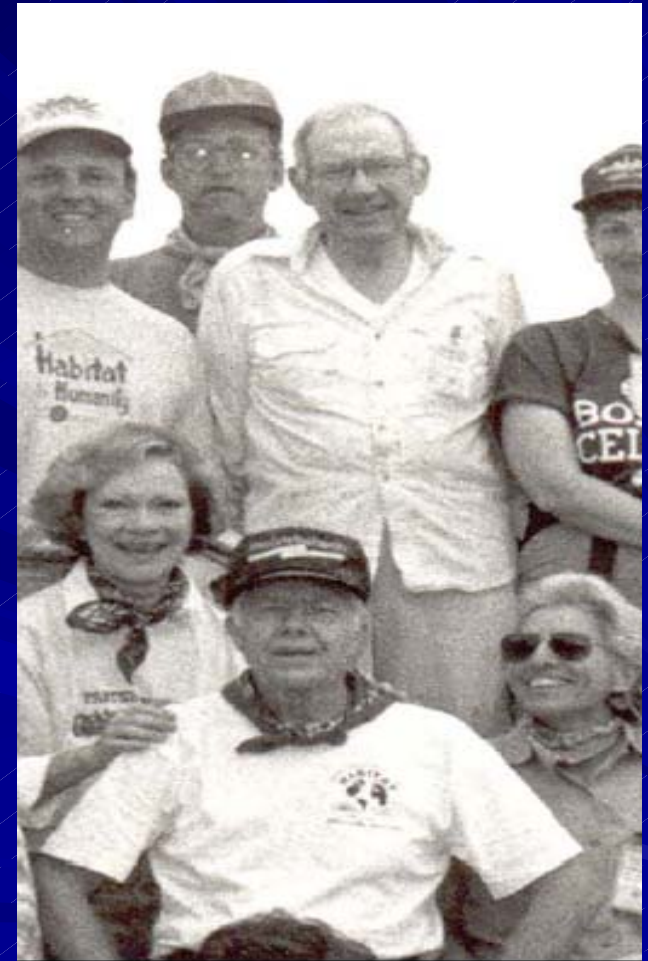
# Many important accomplishments

- 168+ peer-reviewed publications
  - in high quality journals
- 33 book chapters & reviews
- Numerous major discoveries
  - Development of transgenic techniques in plants
  - Sequencing of *agrobacterium* genome
    - Cover story in *Science*
    - Sequencing effort utilized software developed by Milt's son, David
- 2001- elected fellow of American Academy of Microbiology



# But most memorable of all.....

- A family man –
  - Wife of 48 years
  - Father of four children
- A man of great humor
- A man with a kind soul
- A great mentor
- A trusted friend and colleague to many
- He will be missed by many



MILT GORDON, JIMMY AND ROSLYN  
CARTER AND HABITAT VOLUNTEERS  
(TIJUAÑA, MEXICO, JUNE 1990)

# Milton P. Gordon 1930 - 2005

In addition to Sunnie, Gordon is survived by his children, David Gordon of Seattle; Karen Slapik of Austin, Texas; and Peter Gordon of Cambridge, Mass.; sister Gladys Strait of Morristown, N.J.; sister-in-law Molly Gordon of Niagara Falls, N.Y.; and three grandchildren

