Season’s Greetings!

January 2011

As always, it is a real pleasure for me to make contact with all of you, and I am especially grateful to those of you who brightened my holidays with your cards and email greetings, particularly those that included photos of you and/or your beautiful families. I wish I could visit each and every one of you and renew our warm acquaintance. Unfortunately, this is the best I can do right now. Please make sure that I have your most current contact information so we don’t lose touch, and I would very much appreciate information about friends and former classmates whose information may have become out of date. I’d also like to take this opportunity to remind you that you can periodically visit the Ojima Group website, which is still in the process of being “renovated” to make it even more attractive and interactive. Our intention is to make it easier to update and keep the news more current, so visit now, check back often, and send us your news to post. The url is still the same: http://ojima10.chem.sunysb.edu/~ojimaweb/homepage/homepage.html

2010 has been a year of comings and goings for the Ojima Group. Typically, many of them were Professor Ojima’s, as those of you who received his “Season’s Greetings” email already know. Perhaps the most unusual of these was his trip to Jordan, where he participated in the Eurasia Conference on Chemical Sciences and floated on the Dead Sea. Naturally there were the semi-annual ACS Meetings and Reunion Dinners. At the San Francisco meeting he dined with his good friend and colleague, Professor Negishi, the 2010 Chemistry Nobel Prize recipient. The Boston ACS Reunion Dinner was particularly festive and well-attended in honor of Professor Ojima’s election as a Fellow of the American Chemical Society. He also made trips to the Fluorine Conference in Perugia and the Tateshina Conference in Nagano. He and Yoko bid farewell to 2010 with their annual retreat to Hawaii, following the Pacificchem Conference in December.

Meanwhile, there were plenty of other arrivals and departures in the lab. The year began auspiciously with the arrival of our new postdoc, Olivier Marrec, Ph.D. from the Langlois and Billiard groups at the University Claude Bernard, Lyon, France. Just as Olivier was settling into his project, it was time for us to bid a sad farewell to Cristian Paz-Robles, our delightful visiting graduate student from Dr. Silva’s group at the University of Concepcion, Chile. Unfortunately, two days before his March 1 flight to return to his wife and baby daughter, the massive earthquake hit, with its epicenter very near Concepcion. Virtually all communication was disrupted between the disaster area and the rest of the world, so Cristian and all of us had several very anxious days before Dr. Silva was able to contact Cristian via satellite phone and inform him that his family was fine. Unfortunately, the same was not true of the chemistry building at the university, which was totally destroyed by fire and explosions, thus wiping out all of Cristian’s samples, lab notebooks, and all the data that was not stored on his laptop, as
well as all the equipment necessary for him to resume his research. As of this writing, it has still not been rebuilt.

In April, we welcomed to the group Dr. Santosh Yennurajalingam, formerly a research scientist in the Department of Pharmacology, and shortly after that, Dr. Larisa Kuznetsova took a leave of absence to welcome the arrival of her and Leon’s second daughter, Veronica, on May 5th. After a brief period of adjustment, big sister Kristina seems delighted with her too! Meanwhile Chi-Feng (Corey) Lin went home for a vacation in Taiwan, and while he was there he married his lovely Claire. Congratulations to all!

Traditionally, May is a busy month in the Ojima Laboratory, and this year even more so than usual. Along with the celebration and hooding of two new Ojima Ph.D.s, Dr. Stephen Chaterpaul, and Dr. Manish Das, we celebrated the graduation of our BS/MS degree recipient, Christina Susanto, and a particularly bright group of B.S. students, several of whom stayed on in the laboratory to continue their research and pursue M.S. degrees. Samsad Pavel and Tolga Sevınc are bound for medical schools, while Wen Chen, Lucy Li, Melvin Parasram, and Winnie Situ diligently returned to working on their projects.

Very soon the empty benches were filled anew by three first-year graduate students, Bora Park, Tao Wang, and Yang Zang. Almost simultaneously they were joined by a returning high school student researcher, Preya Shah, now a student at Harvard, and Cynthia Bollinger, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Summer Scholar from West Virginia University, and again the lab was buzzing with activity.

The next influx occurred at the end of June and beginning of July, with the arrival of Stephen McQuaker, the 2010 Francis and Marta Johnson Scholarship winner from the University of Glasgow. Within a week he had been joined by our three very talented high school students, Jenny Wu, Nevin Daniel, and Neil Pathak, and a new addition to the ICB&DD, Dr. Tadashi Honda. Dr. Honda is a former faculty member at Dartmouth and is currently the Director, Anti-inflammatory Research Laboratory. Dr. Yennurajalingam also made the transition to having Dr. Honda as her research supervisor. Rounding out the group was a new “Bridges to the Doctorate” transfer student from Queens College, Alejandra Castano. All of the newcomers were suitably feted at the Annual Ojima Barbecue, which you can view at our recently updated website.

Unfortunately, our summer visitors had to return to their “real” lives sooner than we would have liked, beginning with the high school students and followed by Preya and Cynthia, who left just before the majority of the Ojima Group traveled to Boston for the ACS Meeting and special Reunion Dinner (see photos on the website). Last but certainly not least, Stephen McQuaker departed for Glasgow on September 1st, coincidentally the same day that our new visiting Japanese graduate student arrived from Hokkaido University, Akira Saito. Akira came from the research laboratory group of Professor Yoshihiro Sato to spend three months engaged in a project to construct polycyclic skeletons that resemble many natural products with strong medicinal applications. Despite his shy manner, he quickly became a favorite in the group during his brief three month stay. He was joined by another visitor, an exchange student from
Nanjing, China, Longfei Wei, and by a graduate student doing a clinical rotation, Jacob Vineburg. Longfei had to return to China at the end of the semester, but Jacob has become a permanent member of the Ojima Group.

The next departure was new Ph.D. Joseph Kaloko, who defended his thesis on October 19th. After the usual farewell party, he left the following week for a visit home to Virginia before heading to North Carolina for a postdoctoral position. In the present economy we were gratified that Joseph, like Stephen Chaterpaul and Manisha Das before him, had already been hired before they completed their degrees. Times have been hard for most of us, the lab no exception, so this was an encouraging sign, both of the advantage of a doctoral degree from the Ojima Laboratory and of possible improvement in future economic prospects. Another piece of good news arrived in the news that two of our high school students had been recognized in the Siemens Competition, Jenny Wu as a semifinalist, and Nevin Daniel as a regional finalist.

As every Ojima Group member knows, the highlight of November is the Annual Thanksgiving Eve Gala at the Ojima home. Although I missed it myself because of illness, this year’s event even surpassed previous parties, and it also served as the farewell for Akira, who had the good fortune to leave for Japan before all the horrible winter weather that has gripped Long Island this year.

Congratulations were in order again in December! On the 7th, Lucy Li made a successful presentation and defense of her MS Thesis, thus becoming the second M.S. degree awardee of the year from the Ojima Group. We look forward to her return in May for the formal awarding of the diploma at Commencement. At the same time, we learned that Nevin Daniel was awarded the $50,000 2nd Prize in the National Siemens Competition! Excellent!

By mid-December many group members began leaving for the end-of-semester holidays, either to return to their families or to vacation in other climes, to recharge their energy, and to prepare to return in January with full vigor and enthusiasm. I hope all of you had the opportunity to do the same.

*My fondest wish for 2011 is this:*

*For each of you individually, I wish you Inner Peace.*

*For all of us collectively, I wish for Peace on Earth, with love, understanding and respect for all people, and with kindness and “common sense” triumphant over greed and cruelty!*  

*As always,*  
*Love,*  
*Pat*