

From: Djerassi Resident Artists Program <drap@djerassi.org>

Subject: In Celebration: Carl Djerassi

Reply: drap@djerassi.org



ART///SKY Special Edition

In Celebration: Program Co-Founder Carl Djerassi 1923-2015

Dr. Carl Djerassi passed away on Friday, January 30, 2015. He was 91. Dr. Djerassi led a life immersed in both science and the arts. A renowned chemist whose many achievements included the oral contraceptive and antihistamines, to name a few, was also a Stanford professor as well as a noted author, playwright and poet. A bibliography follows.

The Program's friends, benefactors and former residents all appreciated Dr. Djerassi's foresight in founding the Djerassi Resident Artists Program. After the tragic suicide of his artist daughter Pamela in 1978, Dr. Djerassi and his soon-to-be wife Diane Middlebrook, were in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, Italy, by the Uffizi. There they decided, as a tribute to Pamela, they would convert his ranch in the hills over the Pacific into a place to nurture living artists.

He is survived by his son, Dale Djerassi, grandson Alexander Djerassi and stepdaughter Leah Middlebrook.

If you would like to send condolences to Dr. Djerassi's family, address email to dale.djerassi@gmail.com; ground mail to 1101 Green Street, #1501 San Francisco, CA 94109

From the Executive Director

Djerassi Forever

Founders loom large in the evolution of nonprofit organizations. As hundreds of worldwide obituaries and news stories attest, Carl Djerassi loomed large in the world. Carl was more than "The Pill," more than his patents, more than a scientist. He was a playwright, a poet, a professor and a philosopher. He was a father and a grandfather. He loved art and he respected artists. No small thing in this transactional world.

Past trustees gathered earlier this month for the annual Founder's Dinner, the first without Carl in 21 years. In a moving tribute to his father, Dale Djerassi noted that, "Death is, in fact at the very root of the Program," a reference to the suicide of his sister, Pamela (the Program's namesake) in 1978. "I think we all thought Carl would live to be a centenarian," he continued. "He wanted that extra digit, but cancer intervened."

Because Carl had a reputation for being difficult, I met him with some trepidation when I was first hired. He was blunt and direct -- I responded in kind. He loved dark jokes and wordplay. We enjoyed a good relationship that included a new understanding on his part about the Program's fragile finances and buildings. He graciously funded improvements to the Artists' House and a new roof for the Administrative Offices. He corrected my grammar, sent ideas for potential donors and, just within the past few months, shared his vision for the Program's future.

Several artists and donors have asked if residencies will continue now that Carl has died, unaware that the Program has been an independent nonprofit for the past 20 years. (The Program supports itself via a wide array of foundations and individual donors.) The answer is a resounding, "ABSOLUTELY!" We matter too much to fail.

The family has created the Carl Djerassi Memorial Fund to honor his legacy. As you read the scores of testimonies that follow, please allow the enormity of Carl and co-founder Diane Middlebrook's work to sink in. Thousands of paintings, poems, symphonies, dances, films and plays exist because of their shared commitment to living artists. The lives and careers of artists were transformed because of them.

Our mission is as simple as it is timeless. Artists need time and space to take risks.

To nourish themselves. To JUST BE. The best way to honor Carl is to harness ourselves to his vision. To see what he saw. Artists and the artistic process matter.

Djerassi Forever.

Care & Respect,
Margot H. Knight
Executive Director

Tributes

Praise and condolences have streamed in from friends of the Program and former residents. Here is a sampling of entries to Dale Djerassi's and the D.R.A.P. Alumni Facebook pages:



Photo K. Mills

Mauro Staccioli (1987, '89, '90, '99) "I feel a huge sadness that makes it hard to say anything. I remember Carl with immense affection and esteem."

Jerome Kitzke (2009) "I am sad to hear this news. Carl and my father were contemporaries, and when I was in residence my dad asked me if I got to meet him, which I was happy to report I did!"

Claudia Borgna (2009) "My deepest condolences as well as my sincere gratitude. My residency at Djerassi gave me the opportunity to create one of my best works and has become a foundational experience in my life."

Leslie Hirst (2002) "I am touched and honored to have met Carl. His vision and legacy allowed me to have one of the most meaningful experiences of my life at Djerassi."

Alicia Escott (2012) "...Take solace in knowing that someone who touched so many lives possesses the only sort of immortality we have in this world..."

Kay Sprinkel Grace, past trustee, "I feel so extraordinarily fortunate to have known Carl and been able to help in even small ways to keep his vision for Djerassi Resident Artists Program moving forward. He was, as they say, 'one off' and it is up

to all of us to keep this dream alive and well."

Ronee Blakley (2010) "...it is difficult to imagine him [Carl] resting, as now he is, after a life of action, caring and loving."

Brian Goggin (1994, 2006) "[Carl] deeply affected my artistic practice and introduced me to a creative family I cherish. I am ever grateful. Never forget Carl Djerassi."

Paul Payton (2014) "A towering polymath is felled. We are all diminished by his passing."

Teri Tico "What a remarkable man. So ruggedly handsome and deeply thoughtful. So sorry for your loss."

Cheryl Tan (2012) "... I felt so honored to have met him (and to have heard him read his play!)."

Julie Buelteman "The passing of an amazing and powerful man and father."

Allie Light "He made the world better."

Jose Valente (2012) "I'm grateful I got the chance to meet him and to be inspired by his generosity and wisdom."

Sue Lopez "...he leaves a legacy that most men could only dream of."

Ernst Nolte and Gabriele Braun, Hamburg, Germany: "It is a grievous loss to the art world and especially to all who knew him. His curiosity and openness, his extraordinarily wide knowledge, his intensity of life, and last, but not least, his charm made him a very special personality."

Ken Aptekar (1991, 1994) "Carl's fierce energy and belief in artists touched me personally."

Max Evjen "It was an incredible opportunity to work with him on the NYC productions of *Phallacy* and *Taboos*. He will surely be missed."

James Mazzeo "...hundreds of years from now when people read of this past amazing one-hundred years of our planet, your father will be amongst the great men of our time."

Cynthia Taylor "I appreciate all [Carl] did to advance science, art with D.R.A.P., and so much more."

Arian Ardie "The energy lives on."

Chris Black (1999, 2003, 2008, 2011) "My time at the Resident Artists Program literally changed my life's trajectory. Thank you, Dr. Djerassi. Rest in Peace."

Aleksandra Vrebalov (2014) "What an amazing life and legacy!"

Mary Clare Griffin "As one of the Program's chefs, I had the pleasure of having many late-night thoughtful and provocative conversations with both Dr. Djerassi and Diane Middlebrook. It was a rich and unparalleled time in my young life."

Richard Einhorn (2013, 2014) "An extraordinary person in many, many ways."

Clayton Campbell, artist/Campbell Consulting Group, "[Carl] led an interesting life and was a leader in the residency field in his own way. The Program remains an inspirational place, and Dr. Djerassi's legacy is an important one."

Jayson Smart, Rasmuson Foundation, "What an incredible legacy he left behind. This is a good moment to recall that legacy and extend our appreciation for the partnership we have with your artists program."

Members of the private D.R.A.P. Alumni website can view the complete extent of gratitude, respect and condolences sent from alumni throughout the world.



**Carl Djerassi, seated, with grandson Alexander and son Dale.
Photo M. Knight**

Obituary

There are countless news stories about the man and his life. Here is a representative collection:

[Kenyon College](#)

[Stanford University](#)

[Alliance of Artists Communities](#)

[The New York Times](#)

[The Economist](#)

[The Almanac News](#)

Audio/Video: From the BBC: Choose the **Djerassi** story on the menu
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02hw1qn>

From *BBC Inside Science*: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05126zf>



Photo M. Knight

Some personal anecdotes on the life of Carl Djerassi:

Attorney **Julian Stern**, who helped establish the Program as a California nonprofit corporation: "Carl was an unusual, multitalented, one-of-a-kind individual recognized worldwide for his creative drive and accomplishments. He was more than my associate in several pioneer biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies as well as the Program. He was a friend for almost 50 years with whom you could freely discuss problems and arrive at incisive conclusions."

Sue Learned-Driscoll (1983-85), former executive director: "Carl Djerassi hired me three different times (1978, 1982, and 1990) in his office and lab at Stanford University. In between those jobs, I worked with him for two years from 1983 to 1985 as the second executive director of the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, which turned out to be the most memorable job of all. I'm sure Dr. Djerassi was proud of it and felt that it served as a fitting memorial to his daughter Pamela."

Agnes Bourne, ASID, FRSA, designer and past trustee: "About 30 years ago, Carl began referring to me as the 'Djerassi Ranger' as I was his 'naturalist,' going with him on long hikes to find sites for permanent sculptures and other installations. He walked faster than I, so I spent many breathless afternoons recovering. As a trustee of the Foundation, I was very grateful for his personal attention to introducing me to the this treasured location."

"Carl and Diane would spend time in Europe, leaving me to design and complete their San Francisco apartment. It was an incredible responsibility and an adventure to do so without their in-residence supervision. I remember the day they returned. I met them at the airport and brought them home for the first time to see the completed project. It was a fantastic reception. Both of them were delighted. No changes have been made."

Deborah Slater (1992, winter 2006, '10, '12, '14), former resident and trustee: "One of the sweetest memories I have is of my father coming to a National Association of Chemical Engineers Convention in San Francisco in the 80s and being thrilled that he might get to meet Carl Djerassi. I had been accepted to my first artist residency at DRAP and was going to the main evening of entertainment featuring Carl and some local artists (Carl reading poems). I was able to introduce my father to Carl and, in that moment, father and daughter stood as professionals in their fields. It was both funny and lovely."

Patrick Enright, investment advisor and past trustee: "When I was involved with DRAP, I frequently used the phrase "Life is short and Art long" by Hippocrates, as a supportive argument for why investment in creativity through a program like DRAP is so important. And in this context of Carl's passing, the life of Hippocrates -- the father of western medicine, man of letters, teacher, father -- bears more than coincidental symmetry to Carl's legacy. He will be missed."

Richard Pivnicka, former vice chair of the board: "As I was next in line to accept the chairmanship of the board for that following year, I was unable to -- because of my upcoming travel commitments. I told Carl that, but added, 'If there is anything I can do, please do not hesitate to ask.' Carl looked down with his ultraserious face, shaking his head, and then came up smiling and said, 'Yes, Richard. Since you are the Hon. Consul General of the Czech Republic here, I would like my current play, *Menachem's Seed* produced and shown in Prague.'

"Since I felt I had let Carl down, I immediately said, 'Of course I can make that happen' ...without knowing anything whatsoever about the theater business. The next day, I called Carl's office asking for the name of his theatrical agent who I hoped would handle the whole matter.... I was told he had no agent, and was told that all the bookings for his plays from London to the far corners of the globe are, in fact, handled by Carl.

"I was also told by his assistant that there wasn't a current manuscript of the play for me, so I should go to the Stanford bookstore and buy one!....and then have the entire text translated into Czech! And I pondered: How is such a complex task financed? By whom, how much, and when? My wife then suggested I should get a refund on my MBA in finance and just concentrate on being a lawyer -- helping people honor their agreements.

"Well, I bought Carl's 'play book' at Stanford. And in my humble opinion, without being a scientist, MD or philosopher, the manuscript to me was frankly an impressive door stop. It's sad to say the play was somehow beyond my comprehension. And I was very worried how this play could be produced and shown in Prague -- except that the Czechs are far more intellectual and appreciate deep thought more than most of us do here.

"Fast-forwarding, after some trials and tribulations, I am happy to report Carl's play was well received in Prague. In fact, the then-president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, a playwright himself, did receive a copy of Carl's manuscript from me. So I am delighted to have played a bit part on the stage of Carl's extraordinary life...and I am honored to have done so. My wife, Barbara and I will miss him, and will cherish his memory always."



Portrait of Carl Djerassi by Pamela Djerassi. Photo M. Knight

The family has established a memorial fund in honor of Carl Djerassi.
[Donate to the Carl Djerassi Memorial Fund](#)

Bibliography:

Fiction

How I Beat Coca-Cola and Other Tales of One-upmanship
Cantor's Dilemma
The Bourbaki Gambit
Marx, Deceased
Menachem's Seed
NO

Poetry

The Clock Runs Backward
A Diary of Pique

Plays

An Immaculate Misconception
Oxygen (with Roald Hoffmann)
Calculus
NO - A Pedagogic Wordplay for 3 Voices (with Pierre Laszlo)
Phallacy
Sex in an Age of Technological Reproduction: ICSI and Taboos
Foreplay
Insufficiency

YOUR GIFT

Nonfiction

Carl Djerassi in Retrospect, From the Pill to the Pen

The Politics of Contraception

Steroids Made it Possible

The Pill, Pygmy Chimps, and Degas' Horse

From the Lab into the World: A Pill for People, Pets, and Bugs

This Man's Pill: Reflections on the 50th Birthday of the Pill

Four Jews on Parnassus - A Conversation (Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, Schonberg)

Chemistry in Theatre

Scientific Monographs

Optical Rotatory Dispersion: Applications to Organic Chemistry

Steroid Reactions: An Outline for Organic Chemists
(editor)

Interpretation of Mass Spectra of Organic Compounds
(with H. Budzikiewicz and D. H. Williams)

Structure Elucidation of Natural Products by Mass Spectrometry (with H. Budzikiewicz and D. H. Williams)

Mass Spectrometry of Organic Compounds (with H. Budzikiewicz and D. H. Williams)

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Banner Art: *Torii*, Bruce Johnson, 1983. Photo N. Walsh.