

Press Release

American Chemical Society
Office of Public Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Chemical Society launches *Spellbound* video series on how kids become scientists

DENVER, Aug. 28, 2011 —The road to a Nobel Prize began for one scientist in elementary school when his father placed a sign on his bedroom door proclaiming him to be a “doctor.” For another Nobel laureate, it was a childhood breakfast with the famous scientist (and Nobelist) Linus Pauling. Another noted researcher went against all expectations of her day to pursue science in school, even though she was a woman. Yet another took inspiration from a yellow sweater knitted by his mother.

Those are among the experiences that helped launch the careers of scientists from diverse backgrounds who are featured in a new video series launched today by the American Chemical Society (ACS), the world’s largest scientific society. Entitled *Spellbound: How Kids Became Scientists*, its debut coincides with the ACS’ 242nd National Meeting and Exposition in Denver and is part of the Society’s observance of the [International Year of Chemistry](#). Rich with high-definition graphics and animations and commentary suitable for classroom use and other audiences of students and non-scientists, the videos are available without charge at the *Spellbound* website [link TC], the [ACS Video Theater on YouTube](#), on iTunes [link TC] and on [DVD](#) by request.

ACS encourages educators, schools, museums, science centers, news organizations and others to embed links to *Spellbound* on their websites.

Spellbound’s origins lie in the International Year of Chemistry which celebrates, among other topics, the life of Marie Curie and one of Curie’s observations. Curie won two Nobel Prizes, in 1903 and 1911, the first person to do so, for research on radioactivity. “A scientist in the laboratory,” Curie said, “is like a child placed before natural phenomena which impress like a fairy tale.”

The videos tell the story of scientists whose childhood curiosity about everyday things — Curie’s “natural phenomena”— enchanted like a fairy tale. It helped them launch careers in laboratories, win Nobel Prizes, and make other notable achievements.

“We face concerns today about how to encourage children from diverse backgrounds into careers in the ‘STEM’ fields,” noted ACS President Nancy B. Jackson. “That’s science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The scientists in *Spellbound* are from diverse backgrounds. Their curiosity,



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mentors, role models and other early childhood experiences may point to approaches that can be used today and tomorrow in encouraging young people into science.”

Spellbound's launch episode features the story of Ahmed Zewail, Ph.D., winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Zewail is the Linus Pauling Professor of Chemistry and a professor of physics at the California Institute of Technology. He pioneered femtosecond chemistry, the study of ultrafast chemical processes that occur in a millionth of a billionth of a second. The video describes Zewail's supportive family, who encouraged his curiosity. They even went as far as hanging a sign on his door that said, “Dr. Ahmed,” when he was still a studious young child.

Among other scientists featured in upcoming *Spellbound* episodes:

- **Kristala L. Jones Prather, Ph.D.**, associate professor of chemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a self-described “tinkerer” as a child, but didn't know what she wanted to do until a history teacher took an interest.
- **Bassam Shkhashiri, Ph.D.**, professor of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and ACS President-Elect, found inspiration in a humble yellow sweater his mother knitted for him, which sparked an intense interest in color and other aspects of chemistry.
- **Mamie Moy**, professor of chemistry at the University of Houston, shattered society's expectations of women in the early 20th century and pursued a life-long passion for science.
- **Isiah Warner, Ph.D.**, professor of chemistry at Louisiana State University, was a born chemist, performing his first “experiment” at the age of two (which landed him in the hospital). He became a chemist, despite growing up in a rural town with few resources.
- **Nancy Jackson, Ph.D.**, a manager at Sandia National Laboratories and 2011 ACS President, found that mentors made all the difference when she tried to find a way to blend her love for science and policy.
- **Peter Agre, Ph.D.**, director of the Johns Hopkins Malaria Research Institute and winner of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, was influenced by his father — a chemist — and some of his father's colleagues, which included famed Nobelist Linus Pauling.
- **Helen M. Free, Ph.D.**, retired Bayer AG chemist, 1993 ACS President and developer of the first “dip-and-read” diagnostic test strips for managing diabetes, pitched in to help fill the void created by men who left college to contribute to the war effort (World War II), changing her major from English and Latin studies to chemistry.

The American Chemical Society is a nonprofit organization chartered by the U.S. Congress. With more than 163,000 members, ACS is the world's largest scientific society and a global leader in providing access to chemistry-related research through its multiple databases, peer-reviewed journals and scientific conferences. Its main offices are in Washington, D.C., and Columbus, Ohio.

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Summary:

For one scientist, the road to a Nobel Prize began with a sign on his bedroom door calling him “doctor” when he was still in elementary school. For another Nobelist, it was a childhood breakfast with Linus Pauling. These are just a few of the scientists with diverse backgrounds featured in the new video series called *Spellbound: How Kids Became Scientists*, launched today by the American Chemical Society (ACS), the world’s largest scientific society.

Keywords:

Chemistry/Physics/Materials Sciences; Social/Behavioral Science