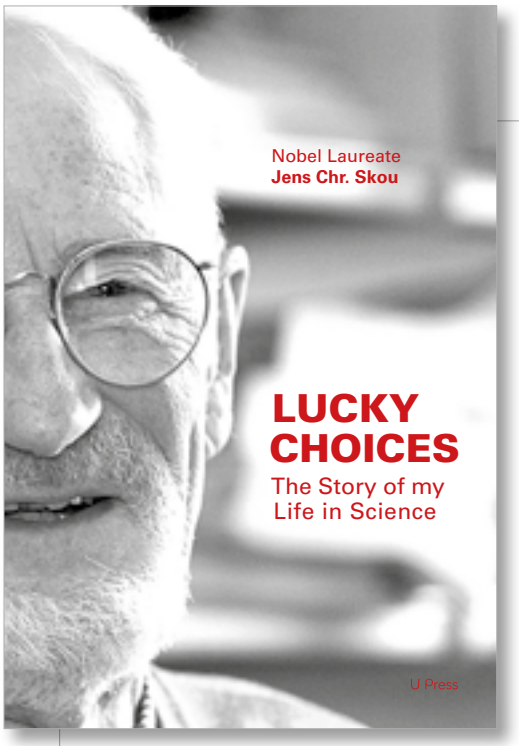
PRESS RELEASE



Nobel Laureate Jens Chr. Skou:
Lucky Choices. The Story of my Life in Science
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Jens Chr. Skou – Facts
Born: 8 October 1918, Lemvig, Denmark
Affiliation at the time of the award: Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark
Prize motivation: ”for the first discovery of an ion-transporting enzyme, Na^+, K^+ -ATPase”
Field: biochemistry
(nobelprize.org.)

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97-year-old Nobel laureate in biochemistry defends freedoms of research

In the memoirs of scientist Jens Chr. Skou – now available in English – luck is credited for playing a part in his discoveries: luck striking a prepared mind that recognizes the potential in ordinary things and events. But above all, Skou stresses that extraordinary breakthroughs happen when the right conditions exist for scientific research, a provocative statement in today’s research environments where immediate usefulness is the key emphasis.

Challenging established methods and defending the freedoms of fundamental research

Jens Chr. Skou would not have been able to make his groundbreaking discovery in the scientific environment as it is organised today in many countries. Throughout Lucky Choices he finds occasion to speak out in defence of the basic principles of scientific research, treasuring the freedoms he had as a researcher to dedicate time to his work, and to choose what he worked on, when he was not constantly looking for funding.

”Our lesson in luck teaches us that we should not attempt to control basic research too strictly, because it is the freedoms of basic research that lead to innovation,” Skou points out.

97-year-old Nobel laureate Jens Chr. Skou was born on 8 October, 1918 in Lemvig, on the west coast of Jutland in Denmark. His childhood was characterized by a very free and active life, which stimulated his imagination, encouraged him to be independent and trained his ability to acquire knowledge as well as to take a critical attitude to both established and innovative ideas.

”Isaac Newton saw an apple fall, James Watt watched a kettle boiling, Wilhelm Conrad saw some shadows on a photographic plate, and all these men knew enough to turn these ordinary things into a new scientific language. These stories also suggest that basic research may be just as far from any eventual practical use. But it does happen, whether sooner or later,” Skou writes.

It has been said that “the discovery of the Na, K-ATPase by Jens Chr. Skou in 1957 must rank as one of the most influential contributions to Bioenergetics and Cell Physiology.” The ion-transporting enzyme has since been acknowledged as a vital ‘pump’ in all cells and continues to surprise scientists working on it today. Its involvement in genetic disease is the latest addition to our understanding of this fascinating mechanism, and there will likely be much more to learn in the future.