

# RECOLLECTIONS MY UNCLE ARNOLD BECKMAN'S VISIT TO NEW ZZEALAND

By Larry Belser  
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Sometime ago I was asked to if I could write some personal recollections of my uncle, Arnold Beckman. Until now I thought that I had little to contribute in this area. I recently received a note from my brother, Karl Belser, giving his recollections. I have reconsidered my earlier thoughts. Maybe I have a unique perspective of him at least within our family because of my science background.

I feel I did not really know my uncle, until he and his wife, my Aunt Mabel , visited my wife Mary and I in New Zealand in 1981. They visited in early September of that year, just after the birth of our first child, Janine. In New Zealand spring officially starts on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. Uncle Arnold thought we should still be in winter. Spring should start on the equinox as it does in the Northern Hemisphere. I remember they found New Zealand cold. They had spent a couple of days in Wellington and found the hotel they stayed so cold they had to get in bed to warm up during the day. We had anticipated that they would be cold and had every heater on in the house, which they found comfortable if they wore sweaters.

My uncle was not well known in Northern California where I grew up in the 50's. I found this was not the case in Southern California. I attended UCSB for two years and learned quickly not to mention my relationship with him if I did not want to be pestered by students wanting jobs at Beckman Instruments or introductions to him. Most people knew him as a wealthy industrialist skilled at making money and someone good to know.

When he visited us in Nelson, New Zealand we were living modestly in a small bungalow. I was the acting research leader in a small research institute (50 staff). In a conversation with my uncle and aunt, I mentioned that I would be not considered successful because I had not made much money. Both of them were adamant that their primary interest and life's work was to benefit science not to make money. My uncle explained that before he started manufacturing pH meters, he investigated the market. I believe he estimated that the market would be around 900 meters. This was hardly enough to start a business on. However, he decided to build them anyway because the scientists who did want the meters said that they would really benefit their research.

His vision to benefit science was not limited to the early years of Beckman. In 1967 while a graduate student at Harvard, I was associated briefly with a cardiac

surgeon who wanted to build an instrument to sequence proteins. The instrument was based on a design of an Australian scientist name Edmond. The instrument would be of great use because it could do longer sequences than could done manually and would do it in a shorter time. It was a difficult task to build such an instrument, but it was my understanding that Edmond himself was quite helpful. Although I did not know it then, Beckman Instruments was developing their own protein sequencing instrument.

As we discussed this during his visit to New Zealand, my uncle informed me that Edmond refused to cooperate because he felt money should not be made from science. My Uncle could not understand this attitude. A commercially available instrument would better for science, because the technology would be available to more scientists. This was before recombinant DNA technology and again there was some question if the development costs would justify the expected sales.

During his visit we spent a day at the Cawthron Institute where I worked. One incident concerning an ultra centrifuge comes to mind. A scientist mentioned he was having problems with it and support in New Zealand was not good. Uncle Arnold got down on his hand and knees and looked around and got the serial numbers.

Within two days the manager of Beckman Instruments in Australia called to remedy the problem.

The visit in 1981 is a fond memory for my wife and I. It showed a side of my Uncle I had not appreciated fully until then. His principles and accomplishments are an inspiration to me.

THE END