

The Adventures of Meg A. Mole, Future Chemist



Dr. Gregory Naumiec

To celebrate this year’s National Chemistry Week theme, “The Healing Power of Chemistry,” I traveled to Conway, Arkansas, to meet **Dr. Gregory Naumiec**. Dr. Naumiec is an Associate Professor at the University of Central Arkansas, where he researches new drug treatments for tropical diseases.

Dr. Naumiec told me that in his lab, he and his students are working to “make new, safe, and affordable medicines for what are called neglected tropical diseases. These diseases affect the lives of nearly two billion people worldwide, and the poorest people are the most affected.”

The doctor explained to me that there are about 20 neglected tropical diseases, including Chagas disease, leishmaniasis, snail fever, sleeping sickness, and others. These diseases are caused by viruses, bacteria, toxins, parasites, and fungi, and they’re common in poor tropical regions around the world. Neglected tropical diseases make hundreds of thousands of people very sick every year, but the people are usually too poor to afford the medicines, if they can even find them at all.

When I walked into his laboratory, I got to see Dr. Naumiec and his team working to combine different chemicals to make their medications. He explained, “While working our chemistry, we wear lab coats, gloves, and safety goggles. We work in our chemical fume hood, which keep us safe from smelly chemicals and harmful fumes.”

I could tell how much Dr. Naumiec cares about his students. “I love getting to teach them chemistry,” he said. “Being able to help train the next generation of doctors, pharmacists, and scientists is a great feeling. What I love most is when I meet a student who tells me they’re afraid of chemistry and that they won’t do well in my class. But over a few weeks or months, I sometimes see the same student become more and more confident, and do better on tests. By the end, they may even tell me that Chemistry was their favorite class!”

Growing up, Dr. Naumiec’s favorite subjects were history and chemistry. After taking chemistry in 11th grade, he decided he wanted to become a chemist. But why? He explained, “I immediately fell in love with chemistry, especially when we did our first experiment —



Personal Profile

Favorite color? Orange

Favorite movie? Jurassic Park (I still love dinosaurs after all these years)

About your family? I have a loving wife, Erin, and the most amazing daughter, Amelia (she’s 10 years old!)

Accomplishment you are most proud of? Being named Professor of the Year for the Central Arkansas local ACS chapter. It was a great honor being nominated by my students for that award!



making cheese! Not only were we learning and doing chemistry, but it was also fun! That whole year, we did amazing experiments, and ended up creating a potato cannon! Taking that class got me started on my journey to becoming a chemistry professor.”

I asked Dr. Naumiec what he likes most his career. “To me,” he said, “the best thing about being a scientist is making something that no one has ever made before. A lot of the medications that my lab makes have never been made by anyone else in the world, which is really cool! Hopefully, one of our medicines will someday help fight neglected tropical diseases. Snail fever, for example, affects children more than adults. So, making a new low-cost, safe, and effective medicine for it could help millions of children worldwide.”

I really enjoyed my visit with Dr. Naumiec. It was exciting to see how his laboratory is working to discover new medicines. They’re helping children and adults all over the world feel “The Healing Power of Chemistry”!

Word Search

Try to find the words listed below – they can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, and read forward or backward!

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| ANTIBIOTIC | GOOD BACTERIA | PENICILLIN |
| BANDAGE | HEALING | PHARMACIST |
| DENTIST | IMMUNITY | SCIENTIST |
| EPIDERMIS | INFECTION | VACCINE |
| ECZEMA | MILK OF MAGNESIA | X-RAY |
| GERM | PATHOGEN | ZOOPHARMACOGNOSY |

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