

The Adventures of Meg A. Mole, Future Chemist

Dr. Bassam Z. Shakhashiri, Professor of Chemistry

My travels this year brought me all the way to Madison, Wisconsin where I met Dr. Bassam Shakhashiri. Dr. Shakhashiri is a professor of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Aside from teaching, he loves to volunteer in the community teaching everyone about how science is fun!

I asked Dr. Shakhashiri to tell me more about his work. He explained, "I work with kids ages 5 to 95 and beyond to share the joy of learning science by doing fun experiments. In my class I have 350 college students. Outside of class I reach thousands of people in person — at shopping malls, conventions, museums, schools and universities — and thousands more on radio, and millions on television and the Internet."

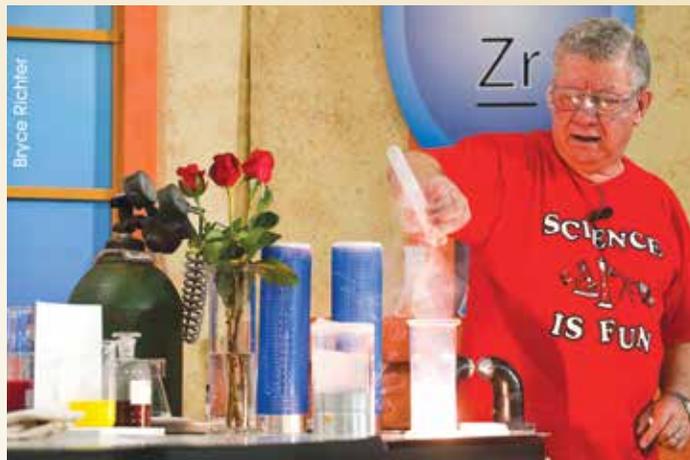
He told me, "I wear my Science Is Fun T-shirt and my Science Is Fun button everywhere I travel. I meet with people at the White House, in the US Congress, at state capitols, in zoos and botanical gardens, and lots of other places around the world."

He added, "I write books to help other teachers explain and demonstrate chemistry to their students. In 2012, I was president of the American Chemical Society! This was a great honor and fantastic opportunity to tell everyone about the beauty of chemistry and what chemists do."

Dr. Shakhashiri told me about his interest in chemistry as a child: "I grew up in Lebanon, and when I was young my mother knitted me a yellow sweater. I loved its bright color. I started to wonder: What makes it yellow? What is yellow? How long will the color last? Will the color match my favorite pants?"

"So many things in our world are colorful: blue sky, white clouds, green trees," said Dr. Shakhashiri. "Color was everywhere, and ever-changing, and I wanted to understand it! As I grew up and studied science, it was very satisfying to learn explanations for my childhood questions."

He enjoyed conducting experiments as a child. With his parents' help, he would safely conduct experiments in the kitchen. He liked "watching color changes, playing with soap bubbles and wondering about their colors and also why they float and pop." Sometimes he even learned how to hook up electric circuits!



Dr. Shakhashiri decided to go into science because he "wanted to understand our beautiful complex world and how scientists can help protect our planet from destruction." His favorite subjects in school were science, religion, and philosophy.

Now that he is an adult, I asked Dr. Shakhashiri what he has enjoyed so much about his job. He told me that he loves to "share fun experiments with children and their parents. I have thousands of letters and drawings from children who have watched my shows in person and on television."

To learn more, he told me I could tell all of my friends to visit his website at www.scifun.org. "You can browse around on our website," he told me, "especially where we have posted experiments you can do at home."

He also told me all about how many children come to his Science is Fun shows, "to see exciting experiments and learn about science. The biggest show takes place every holiday season, and is called 'Once Upon a Christmas Cheery, In the Lab of Shakhashiri.' The event just celebrated its 45th anniversary!"

For those who cannot go to one of his shows, there is a YouTube channel called "WISLscifun" that everyone can visit! I hope everyone checks it out and agrees that Science IS Fun!

Personal Profile

FAVORITE COLOR? Red

FAVORITE PASTIME/HOBBY?

Listening to music

ACCOMPLISHMENT YOU'RE PROUD OF?

My daughter

ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

My wife June and I live in Madison with our dog, Oliver. Our daughter, Elizabeth, (who recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro!) graduated in 2007 from UW-Madison, and received her law degree from the University of Michigan Law School in Ann Arbor in 2010; she and her husband Bob live in Chicago.

