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## **Nobel Committee called this scientist on board a flight to inform him of his Award**

Friends, bringing to you yet another interesting story of a great scientist, Richard R. Ernst, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in the year 1991. Dr. Ernest could achieve this enviable level of professional excellence “for his contributions to the development of the methodology of high resolution nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy” (quoted from the official website Nobelprize.org).

He was born in the year 1933 in Winterthur in Switzerland. His father Robert Ernst was a teacher of architecture at the local technical high school. He spent his childhood in Winterthur and grew up with the loving company of two sisters and parents. Winterthur’s local churches were a place of religious music practice and it also had number of different heavy manufacturing industries. This gave him the opportunity to have a closer view of both music and machinery, and made him inclined to both, as a child. As a high school student, he was a regular member of many church music ensembles playing violoncello, a string instrument. Eventually, he also developed interest in musical composition and practiced extensively throughout the high school days. His love for chemistry was a kind of accident. At the age of 13, once he came across a box filled with several chemicals, remainders of an uncle, a metallurgical engineer who died in 1923 (10 years before Richard’s birth). Richard Ernst got attracted to the different colourful chemicals in the box and started playing by mixing them in different combinations, leading to a few explosions and a lot of smoke. Survived by this incident, he developed more interest into the subject and started reading chemistry books borrowed from the local library in Winterthur.

After finishing high school, he joined Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH-Z) for his undergraduate studies in chemistry. He obtained “*Diplomierter Ingenieur Chemiker*” from the same institute and joined military services for some time. Richard Ernst came back to academics again and started his PhD in the laboratory of Professor Günthard in ETH-Zurich, where he worked on NMR spectroscopy. On completion of his PhD with extensive experience in the field of NMR, he continued working in the same area in different capacities in different organizations. In the year 1968, he became the lead of the NMR research group at the Laboratorium für Physikalische Chemie of ETH-Zurich and retired in 1998.

This incident was regarding the announcement of Dr. Ernest being awarded with the Nobel Prize. The Nobel Committee in Stockholm has a tradition of making phone calls to the winners just before the official announcement of the award in public. When the Nobel Committee officials wanted to do the same for Dr. Ernest in October 1991, he was on board a flight. Knowing this, the officials from Stockholm made arrangements to make a call to the pilot of the flight he was travelling in. After getting the call, the pilot himself went to Dr. Ernest to disclose the news and said that the Nobel Committee official is waiting on the call to talk to him. The pilot took Dr. Ernest to the cockpit, where he got the formal official confirmation for the award and later, he also called his family and friends from the flight.

Source: nobelprize.org and Wikipedia