



WHO WAS PAUL ROBITSCHKEK?

The life of Paul Robitschek is an embodiment of the American dream and what democracy has to offer. As a Czech immigrant Paul came to the United States and built a career pioneering chemical and plastic manufacturing for over half of the 20th century. The Paul Robitschek Scholarship is Paul's legacy to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, promoting democracy and free market economics by providing an opportunity for undergraduate Czech students to pursue a year of study and cultural exploration in America's heartland.

Before applying, please take a moment to read this short biography of Paul Robitschek to learn about the life that has shaped an important legacy and connection between the Czech Republic and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

1916 | Birth & Youth

Paul Robitschek's father, Otto was a wholesale textile merchant who had a reputation as an honest businessman, with a special skill for arbitrating disputes. He briefly traveled to the United States early in his career before returning to Czechoslovakia, where he married Frieda Bedriska.

In 1916 they gave birth to Paul Robitschek, their second son. As a young boy, Paul attended elementary and secondary school in Prague before going on to study medicine at Charles University. At the age of 22 Paul came down with scarlet fever and had to withdraw from his studies. By 1939 he had lost both his parents to disease.

1939 | Escaping Hitler & Meeting Alice

On March 15, 1939, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and 15 days later, Paul fled to London, England where he enrolled in Northern Polytechnic (now the University of London) to study chemistry.

Upon completing his degree two years later, Paul took his first job as a researcher with De La Rou, a major British manufacturer of plastics. From 1942 to 1946 Paul worked in the De La Rou laboratories until being hired by Leta Chemical Company, where he worked until 1949.

Paul's wife, Alice Sandell, was born in London in 1917. They met during the war at a social occasion. At the time, she was working as a secretary at a fashion house. Alice was interred during the war in Italy. She was repatriated in 1944 and they were married in 1951.

Alice worked outside of their home only for the first year of their marriage. During her life, she spent her time making a home for the Robitscheks and developing a passionate interest in weaving, drawing and flower arranging. They had no children.

1949 | Moving to the U.S.A.

In 1949, Paul left England for the United States where he was hired by Hooker Chemical, in Niagara Falls (later acquired by Oxidental Petroleum). Hooker was then a major manufacturer of organic chemicals, and was interested in getting into plastics research.

At Hooker, Paul worked for Jesse Babcock, who told Paul, "If you make yourself useful, we'll keep you. If you don't, we'll fire you."

Paul convinced Hooker to get into plastics. Two years later, he was made a supervisor, and was later promoted to manager, overseeing the research of 30 people; 15 of which had PhDs in chemistry. Hooker then changed its name from Hooker Chemical to Hooker Chemical and Plastics. Paul was again promoted, this time to Director of Research. He remembered "working like a dog" for 9 years during which time Hooker acquired 30-40 patents. Paul reported directly to J.H. Bruun, Director of Research.

1958 | Leading the Way

In 1958, Paul left Hooker for Owens Corning Fiberglass in Granville, OH, where he worked as Manager of Plastics. While there, Owens secured several patents on fiberglass bonding.

In 1963, Paul went to Central Processing, which was owned by Vancouver Plywood, and manufactured adhesives for plywood. At that time, there were 7-8 companies on the West Coast that produced glue for the plywood industry. Central Processing was the smallest and least profitable of these companies.

Within the first 6 months with Central Processing, Paul fired all of the employees and one year later he convinced Vancouver Plywood to sell the unit to Skelly Oil.

In 1965, Skelly formed Chembond where Paul was appointed President of the company where he served from 1965-1981. During his tenure, Chembond grew from 20 employees to 150 working on four shifts, 24-hours a day. The company became very profitable, and in 1979, sales grew to \$40 million propelling Chembond to one of the top three plastics companies in the United States. Paul was the "darling" of the company.

Paul remembers Chembond as a "fair" company. The company's philosophy was to always be truthful, open and fair allowing Chembond to recruit and retain highly motivated and loyal employees. If employees did not work hard, they did not stay. For those who worked hard, compensation was fair. Paul remembers never being dishonest or telling a lie to his employees or to management.

1981 | Reflecting on Life

In 1981, Paul retired at age 65. He remembers with pride his career with Skelly. Paul greatly admired Donald Miller, then President of Skelly, as a man of extraordinary compassion. He believes that he was a "tough taskmaster" and believed that throughout his career, the companies that he worked for saw results. Paul worked with a "reap what you sow" attitude which he modeled and required of his employees with whom he also required honesty and fairness in all they did.

In 1979, Paul had surgery for a cancer in his leg, the same year he and Alice built their current home in Eugene, Oregon. After his retirement in 1981, the Robitscheks traveled to England and Yugoslavia, but did not return to the Czech Republic until after 1989. Since then, he has been back four times. In 1990, Alice died after battling cancer.



NEBRASKA

1996 | Establishing the Scholarship

In 1996, Paul established the Robitschek Czech Scholar Program with the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Because of his commitment to democracy and free market economics, Paul established the program to give talented Czech students who might not otherwise have the means or opportunity, to spend a year studying in the United States. During their year abroad, Robitschek scholars enhance their education by experiencing the cultures of the United States while receiving a top-notch education at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln before returning to the Czech Republic to finish their degree.



NEBRASKA