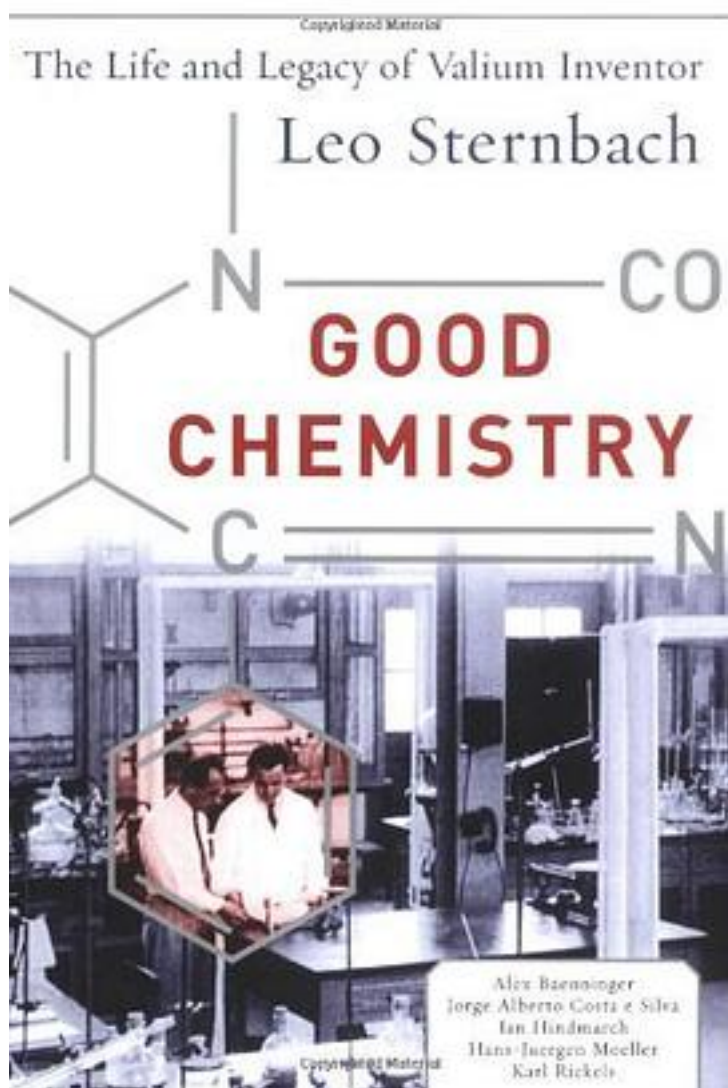


Good Chemistry



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Fifty years ago, when it came to treating acute anxiety and related disorders, the cure was often worse than the disease. Other than 'the talking cure,' sufferer's options were limited to a handful of toxic substances, such as barbiturates, which, in addition to causing significant impairment of cognitive and motor functions, were highly addictive and potentially lethal. All that changed suddenly in 1960, when the healthcare company Roche introduced Librium, the first of the benzodiazepine class of drugs. Offering the promise of a fast-acting, effective and safer alternative, the benzodiazepines revolutionized the medical treatment of anxiety and convulsive disorders and ushered in a new era in psychopharmacology research. The invention of the benzodiazepines is now viewed as one of the greatest accomplishments of 20th century pharmacology. Now, for the first time, "Good Chemistry" tells the fascinating story of the benzodiazepines and the genius behind the invention. Beginning in 1908, in the Adriatic resort town of Abazzia, now a part of Croatia, "Good Chemistry" traces the life and career of Leo Sternbach, the pharmacist's son who, in the face of withering anti-Semitism and financial hardship, followed his passion for chemistry to become one of the most influential scientists of the 20th century, or as he was dubbed by "U.S. News & World Report", one of the Twenty-five Shapers of the Modern Era. We learn about his early years as a student in Europe prior to joining Roche in Switzerland in 1940, and how the company aided his flight from Nazi persecution to a new home in the United States. It was there that, in 1958, while working as a research chemist for Roche, he made his momentous discovery in a discarded test tube containing a few crystals from a long-forgotten experiment. And we learn of his no less impressive accomplishments in the years following, for which he holds an astonishing 230 patents. The second half of "Good Chemistry" is a compelling medical and social history of Valium and its rise to near-iconic stature in our popular culture. The authors offer a lively account of Valium's uses and abuses over the past forty years and explain how its evolution from 'panacea' to "Mother's Little Helpers" was based on a common misconception of Valium's effects on the human nervous system. They also review exciting recent research into the psychopharmacology of benzodiazepines that has revealed how, unlike virtually every other class of anxiolytic, sedative, and mood stabilizer, the benzodiazepines work in harmony with the body's own natural system for inhibiting anxiety and managing stress. Each day, tens of millions of people around the globe take some form of benzodiazepine to calm their fears, to help them sleep, to overcome life-threatening seizures, or to assist them through the trauma of surgery. "Good Chemistry" tells the captivating story of the development of these medications and of the remarkable man who introduced them to the world. The fascinating story of one of the most important breakthroughs of 20th century pharmacology and the man behind the invention the development by Roche of Valium and the benzodiazepine class of chemical compounds was among the greatest accomplishments of modern pharmacology. "Good Chemistry" combines a detailed account of that momentous development with an engaging biography of Leo Sternbach, the brilliant chemist who invented Valium and whose achievement heralded a new era in research and therapeutics. A thought-provoking biographical history, "Good Chemistry" reveals the fascinating story of a gifted young man who, forbidden to follow his passion for chemistry because he was Jewish, fled the persecution of his homeland for the United States, overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to become one of the 20th century's premier chemists. It also traces the surprising and often dramatic developments that led to the invention of Valium, and traces the grim history of previous drug therapies for anxiety that made the invention of the benzodiazepine group of drugs such a revolution in drug treatments. And it offers a fascinating cultural history of one of the most praised and maligned drugs of modern times and its impact on society.

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