



TMS Member Profiles

W.M. Goldberger Examines “the Business of Contract Research” in New Novel

By Lynne Robinson

“It’s not the story for me to write. Maybe you should write it, Doc.”

“Maybe I will, Mr. Schaap. Maybe I will.”

Uttered by the fictional Dr. Robert Miller as the closing words of a new mystery novel, *Sublimation*, the statement also reflects the motivation of the book’s author, W.M. Goldberger, for telling the tale.

The book’s title refers to the process of fractional sublimation that can be used for the separation of volatile metal chlorides, and, as suggested in the book, the possibility that it could be used as the basis for a low-cost means of uranium enrichment. In the story, Marvin Khorbin, a brilliant young scientist who pioneered the development of the sublimation process, is murdered. The case goes unsolved, prompting Jim Schaap, a *New York Times* reporter, to investigate it as the subject of a book. For background, he turns to Miller’s scientific expertise and knowledge of the research and development culture

in which Khorbin had worked.

Goldberger also offers the definition of sublimation as a psychological term in the novel’s prefacing pages: “A defense mechanism when displacement ‘serves a higher cultural or socially useful purpose, as in the creation of art or inventions.’” This reference serves to underscore the major themes that Goldberger explores “to offer some insight into the world of scientific and engineering research, and more specifically, into one segment—the business of contract research.”

Goldberger drew heavily from his own professional experiences to write his novel. After holding a number of research and management positions at Battelle Memorial Institute-Columbus, Goldberger joined the Superior Graphite Company in 1979, where he retired as vice president of research in 2002.

His inspiration for *Sublimation* stemmed from an article that he had been working on that examined why many successful research and development

projects have never been put to beneficial use. “Depending on the source of funding, research programs may not be done for strictly scientific purpose, but for business or political reasons and are subject to abrupt change,” he said. “I felt there would be more leeway to discuss these subjects, and perhaps made more interesting to a broader range of readers, if written as fiction.”

Goldberger loosely based Khorbin’s character on the life and unsolved 1980 murder of Gerald Bull, the Canadian aerodynamics and artillery expert who designed the so-called “Supergun”. The projects that Goldberger describes in the book were ones that he had direct involvement with at Battelle. “To provide the reader with an understanding of the thrill of solving a difficult problem and the issues one might face in the implementation of an invention, it was best to use actual projects,” he said.” It took Goldberger roughly three years to complete the book.

Sublimation is Goldberger’s first novel, but not his first foray into the creative arts. He has also written and staged two musical plays and composed a number of original songs. He notes that he enjoyed the writing process, but found that his experience in creating *Sublimation* offered many other rewards as well. “My interest in writing *Sublimation* stemmed from my desire to put in perspective, for myself, the elements that made up a significant part of my career,” he said. “A part of that, too, was the pleasure I found in recalling the many individuals who contributed to the technical advances made. Having done that, I hope the book will be of interest and of some help to those now considering and those embarked on a research career.”

W.M. Goldberger (above) self-published his first novel (right) through Amazon’s Create Space program, and proudly notes that it was selected to advance to the second round of the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Contest in the General Fiction category. *Sublimation* is available for purchase through Amazon and Kindle. Additional information about Goldberger’s other creative endeavors is available on his website at wmgoldberger.com.

Each month, *JOM* profiles a TMS member and his or her activities both in and out of the realm of materials science and engineering. To suggest a candidate for this feature, contact Lynne Robinson at lrobinson@tms.org.