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Harry Coover, Super Glue inventor, dies at 94

**By T. Rees Shapiro, Monday,
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Harry Coover, 94, who as a young chemist in the 1940s and '50s discovered a powerful adhesive compound known today as Super Glue and Instant Krazy Glue, died March 26 at his home in Kingsport, Tenn. He had congestive heart failure.

Dr. Coover was happy to admit that his invention — which has been used to seal blood vessels in open-heart surgery, identify criminals in forensic labs and assemble atomic bombs — occurred by accident.

In 1942, as a chemist with Eastman Kodak, Dr. Coover was tasked with developing a plastic rifle sight for use in World War II. One of the compounds he tested, cyanoacrylate, was incredibly durable but had one annoying drawback.

“The damn problem was everything was sticking to everything else,” he told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2005. “We had a hard time using it in molds.”

In 1951, Dr. Coover was testing a heat-resistant polymer for use in aircraft windshields when he remembered his encounter with cyanoacrylate.

When a colleague permanently bonded the lenses of an expensive optical instrument with a droplet of the liquid, Dr. Coover had an epiphany.

He found that the compound solidified after coming into contact with trace amounts of moisture, creating an extremely strong polymer layer between two surfaces.

“It suddenly struck me that what we had was not a casting material but a super glue,” he said in 2005.

Dr. Coover introduced his product to the public in 1958 on an episode of the game show “I’ve Got a Secret,” hosted by Garry Moore.

Using Eastman 910 — aptly named because its fast-acting adhesive is effective by the count of 10 —

Dr. Coover was able to hoist Moore in the air as the host dangled from a set of glued pipes.

After its release, Eastman 910's remarkable strength and sticky quality led to a wide variety of applications.

At Georgetown University, doctors used Eastman 910 to glue leg fractures in rats, rabbits and dogs. Cosmetic surgeons have used Super Glue to reduce scarring. Forensic scientists have applied the glue to recover fingerprints at crime scenes. In the 1950s, it was used in the manufacturing of atomic weapons.

Of all its uses, Dr. Coover was most proud of its application in the Vietnam War. Many combat medics carried a spray version of his glue because it was a coagulant that could be applied to bloody wounds.

"There are lots of soldiers who would have bled to death," Dr. Coover told Ohio's Akron Beacon Journal in 2004. "It saved a lot of lives."

Harry Wesley Coover Jr. was born March 6, 1917, in Newark, Del.

As a teenager, he was driving over a railroad crossing when his car was hit by a train, his family said. The accident sent Dr. Coover into a coma for several months. When he awoke, he had no memory of the crash or his life before he was 16.

He recovered and graduated in 1941 from Hobart College in Geneva, N.Y. He then attended Cornell University, where he received a master's degree in 1942 and a doctorate in 1944, both in chemistry.

His wife of more than 63 years, Muriel Zumbach Coover, died in 2005. Survivors include three children, Melinda Paul of Greensboro, N.C., Harry W. Coover III of Geneva, N.Y., and Stephen Coover of Oak Ridge, Tenn.; a sister; and four grandchildren.

Dr. Coover retired from Eastman Kodak as vice president in 1984. He continued to work for many years as a consultant.

In 2010, President Obama awarded Dr. Coover the National Medal of Technology and Innovation.

Throughout his career, Dr. Coover held more than 460 patents; a number of them were for variations of his glue.

When licensing agreements and different patents ran out, several companies began developing adhesives based on Dr. Coover's original.

Beyond its practical uses, Super Glue has become a fixture in slapstick comedy and popular culture.

In the 1983 movie "The Man Who Loved Women," Burt Reynolds and a tube of Instant Krazy Glue become stuck to a white shag carpet and a miniature dog named Simba.

There are also plenty of pranks involving Super Glue, including the liberal application of the adhesive to a toilet seat — a college-dorm staple.

Dr. Coover suggested that victims of such a scheme should soak in warm water. If that doesn't provide relief, he said, try nail polish remover.

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