

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MONICA L. VETTER

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah

on

5 and 8 November 2004

From the Original Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles

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Postdoctoral Fellowship with Dr. Yuh Nung

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Selected Publications

Steele, M.R., Inman, D.M., Calkins, D.J., Horner, P.J. and Vetter M.L. (2006) Microarray Analysis of Retinal Gene Expression in the DBA/2J Model of Glaucoma. *Invest Ophthalmol Vis Sci*, 47:977-985.

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ABSTRACT

Monica L. Vetter grew up in Markham, Ontario, Canada, the eldest of three siblings. Vetter's father worked for Honeywell and in the computer industry generally—and was gifted musically—and her mother was a nurse who, later in life, founded the Head Injury Association of Toronto, in part in response to a family tragedy. Vetter's parents provided her with access to all the things typical of childhood: gymnastics, swimming, and piano lessons; she loved reading, spending much time in the library, playing soccer, and having fun with her brothers outdoors.

She entered McGill University, deciding to major in biosciences. Her interest in science led to several summers spent in various academic labs working on muscle contraction at the University of Ottawa, motor cortex and motor control in primates at the University of Toronto, and eye movements and the neural control of eye movements at McGill. Wanting to experience the academic world beyond the confines of the traditional Canadian/American school systems, Vetter spent a year abroad at the Free University in Berlin, Germany. During her time there, she applied to and was accepted at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), where she conducted research in the lab of J. Michael Bishop on molecular genetics and signaling pathways in neuronal cells. She remained at UCSF to undertake a postdoctoral position in Yuh Nung Jan's laboratory focusing on *ath5* transcription factor and the regulation of the initial events in vertebrate retinal neural development. From there she accepted a faculty appointment at the University of Utah, developing her research on retinal neurogenesis.

At the end of the interview, Vetter talks about the biomedical revolution and her decision to pursue academic research rather than work in industry; the issue of patents; her interest in the history of science; and the role of the scientist in scientific public policy and literacy. She concludes with thoughts about the impact of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award on her work and the process of conducting scientific research.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

William Van Benschoten, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., History, University of California, Riverside, 1990; M.A., History, University of California, Riverside, 1991; C.Phil., History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1995.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Vetter's office at the University of Utah.

Dates of sessions: November 5 and 8, 2004.

Total number of recorded hours: 4.5.

Persons present during interview: Vetter and Van Benschoten.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series with Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program in conjunction with the Pew Charitable Trusts's Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Oral History and Archives Project. The project has been designed to document the backgrounds, education, and research of biomedical scientists awarded four-year Pew scholarships since 1988.

To provide an overall framework for project interviews, the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Van Benschoten held a telephone preinterview conversation with Vetter to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in Vetter's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including Vetter's proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol Squires edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Vetter reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Carol Squires prepared the table of contents and TechniType Transcripts compiled the guide to proper names.

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