

SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE

DENNIS FENTON

Life Sciences Foundation

Transcript of a Research Interview
Conducted by

Mark Jones

in

Malibu, California

on

5 August 2013

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History
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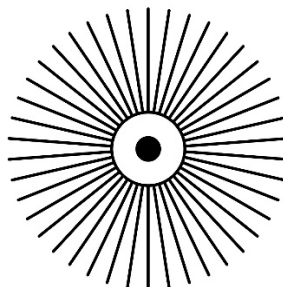
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Dennis Fenton, interview by Mark Jones in Malibu, California (Philadelphia: Science History Institute, Research Interview Transcript # 0035).

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INTERVIEWEE

Dennis Fenton was born and raised in Mineola on Long Island, New York. He attended Manhattan College in the Bronx and later received his PhD in microbiology from Rutgers University in 1977. Motivated by his father's cancer diagnosis, Fenton was interested in becoming an industrial microbiologist. For his thesis, Fenton purified enzymes for the degradation of a polymer on the fungi cell wall, which had applications during the Vietnam War to prevent fungal infections in burn wounds. Fenton's graduate advisor, Dr. Douglas E. Eveleigh, landed him an interview with Pfizer, where Fenton worked for three years. During that time, Fenton became interested in biotechnology while reading about recombinant DNA and Genentech. He began working for Amgen in California; the company was in its early years, and Fenton was working on fermentation. While he was working as a laboratory head, Amgen successfully cloned erythropoietin [EPO], which led to the product Epogen. Despite his science background, Fenton was promoted to the vice president of sales and marketing, though he also remained active in process development. In this role, Fenton helped to raise sales and marketing from three hundred million to roughly one billion dollars. He also dealt with the ongoing legal battles between Amgen and Genetics Institute and Johnson & Johnson. In 1995, Fenton left sales and marketing and took over as head of operations, where he oversaw the creation of manufacturing plants in Puerto Rico and Rhode Island. He lives in California, where he enjoys an active lifestyle and travels with his wife.

INTERVIEWER

Mark Jones holds a PhD in history, philosophy, and social studies of science from the University of California, San Diego. He is the former director of research at the Life Sciences Foundation and executive editor of LSF Magazine. He has served in numerous academic posts, and is completing the definitive account of the origins of the biotechnology industry, entitled *Translating Life*, for Harvard University Press.

ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

Staff of the Life Sciences Foundation conducted this interview, which became a part of our collections upon the merger of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the Life Sciences Foundation into the Science History Institute in 2018. The Center for Oral History at the Science History Institute edited and formatted this transcript to match our style guide, but, as noted, Science History Institute staff members did not conduct the interview.

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