

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MATTHEW K. WALDOR

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Tufts University
Boston, Massachusetts

on

26 and 28 January 2004

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

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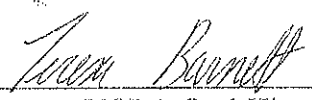
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Selected Publications

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ABSTRACT

Matthew K. Waldor grew up in the suburbs of Newark, New Jersey, the middle of three children. Waldor's father spent much time in the American military—in active and reserve duty, eventually retiring at the rank of major general—though mostly worked at an insurance agency he founded; his mother was a homemaker. Waldor spent much of his youth interested in and committed to learning, as well as partaking in the normal activities of childhood: reading, piano lessons, and playing in the woods near his home. His early interests were in the arts and humanities, though he was not entirely certain about his career path.

He attended Yale University and spent several years intensively committed to his schoolwork before deciding to take a semester off to travel to Spain, where he taught English and planned to write a novel (though never did). He returned to Yale, majoring in philosophy and biology, and decided to pursue medicine for his profession. Before starting at Stanford University Medical School, Waldor had what he considered his first real research experience at Woods Hole Science Center working on neural systems in the leech nervous system. His interest in scientific research piqued, Waldor sought out research while in medical school and ended up in Larry Steinman's laboratory studying autoimmunity in the nervous system, specifically developing mouse models. Although he was accepted to Stanford's MD/PhD program, Waldor declined and continued to conduct research, and then obtain his PhD independently, while at Stanford; he also had the fortune to learn how to think about and do science from Leonore A. Herzenberg. After becoming interested in infectious diseases during a class of Stanley Falkow's at Stanford and after his residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, Waldor began a clinical fellowship in infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital and then a postdoctoral fellowship in John J. Mekalanos's laboratory at Harvard Medical School, researching a new strain of epidemic cholera. From there he accepted a position at Tufts University, conducting research in microbial genetics and infectious diseases studying phage replication, regulation, and antibiotic resistance.

Near the end of the interview Waldor discusses the requirements of scientific practice and the ways in which he balances his career with his family life; his professional goals; his process for writing journal articles; and a typical workday. The interview ends with reflections on the privatization of scientific research; gender and ethnic issues in science; and the role of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences grant in his laboratory.

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:

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Persons present during interview: Waldor 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 Waldor to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in Waldor's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including Waldor'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.

Waldor did not review the transcript, some names therefore remain unverified.

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

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