

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MATTHEW L. MEYERSON

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Karen A. Frenkel

at

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Broad Institute
Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts

on

17, 18, and 19 January 2006

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



Matthew L. Meyerson

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MATTHEW L. MEYERSON

1963 Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 4 June

Education

1985 A.B., Chemistry & Physics, Harvard College
1993 M.D., Harvard Medical School
1994 Ph.D., Biophysics, Harvard University

Professional Experience

1994-1996 Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts
Residency in Clinical Pathology;
1998-present Consultant in Pathology

1995-1998 Whitehead Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Research fellow in Biology; Robert Weinberg Laboratory,

1998-2005 Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts
Assistant Professor of Pathology,

1998-2004 Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, Massachusetts
Scientific co-director, Belfer Center for Cancer Genomics
1998-2005 Assistant Professor of Pathology,
2005-present Associate Professor of Pathology

2004-present Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology
Member of the Affiliated Faculty

2004-present Broad Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Associate Member

Honors

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1990-1991 Johnson and Johnson HST Research Fellowship
1995-1998 Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Foundation Physician-Scientist
Fellowship
1998-2001 Claudia Adams Barr Investigator Award, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

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ABSTRACT

Matthew L. Meyerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts, the youngest of three children. His family moved several times before finally settling in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when Matthew was seven. His parents were both academics in city planning and then college professors. His father became president of State University of New York at Buffalo and then the University of Pennsylvania; he was the first Jewish president of a major university. His mother taught sociology and then was on Philadelphia's City Planning Commission. Meyerson's interest in science began early: he loved to collect rocks and minerals and thought he might become a geologist. His first influential teacher was his fourth-grade teacher, who had the students do science experiments. His ninth-grade biology teacher was especially inspiring. His extracurricular activities included fencing, at which he was competitive; running; and exploring the outdoors. He also played the piano. He read extensively and still loves to read.

He decided early to attend Harvard University. College experiences included an overwhelming math class that cemented his resolve to become an experimental scientist, rather than a theoretical scientist. He did research on quinones during college in Leslie Dutton's laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania and on enzyme evolution in Steven Benner's laboratory at Harvard. He spent a year in Japan at the University of Kyoto and then began medical school.

Meyerson entered the joint health sciences and technology graduate program at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His medical school experiences included meeting his future wife, who was also a medical student. Meyerson pursued doctoral research on cyclin-dependent kinases involved in cell-cycle regulation in Edward Harlow's laboratory at Harvard. He did his residency in clinical pathology. Meanwhile, he and his wife, by now doing her own residency in pediatrics, began their family, which eventually grew to four children. Meyerson accepted a postdoctoral fellowship on cell immortalization in Robert Weinberg's laboratory at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Here he discusses the running of the Harlow lab; the process of conducting scientific research; his collaboration with Christopher Counter at MIT on telomerase genes in yeast; and his work in cell-cycle genetics identifying human telomerase gene activity and cell immortalization. He compares Weinberg's mentoring style with his own.

Meyerson accepted a position at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and set up his lab to accord with his decision to work on lung-cancer genetics. He talks about the running of his lab and about his funding history. Meyerson discusses his research on cancer genomics, functional biochemistry, and computational subtraction genetic analysis; and broader applications of his work genetically targeting drug treatment for lung cancer.

Meyerson's current research is focused on genomics sequencing cancer causing mutations. He talks about the process of writing journal articles; his role in the lab and his management style; his teaching responsibilities and philosophy; science versus religion; foreign students in science; and being a principal investigator. He answers questions about the grant-writing process; how he would go about setting the national science agenda; his view of the issue of patents; and David Livingston's mentorship. Meyerson concludes by explaining his professional and personal goals and talking about the difficulty balancing family and career.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Karen A. Frenkel, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., Hampshire College, 1978; M.S., Boston University, 1982

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Matthew Meyerson's offices at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA, and at the Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA.

Total number of recorded hours: 4.5

Persons present during interview: Meyerson and Frenkel.

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' 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, Frenkel held a telephone pre-interview conversation with Meyerson to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, website address, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. She also reviewed the documentation in Meyerson's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including his 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.

Meyerson did not review the transcript. Consequently, some proper names and other information remain unverified.

Carol Squires prepared the table of contents. Technitype Transcribing compiled the guide to proper names.

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