CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

MICHAEL K. SKINNER

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Arnold Thackray and Richard Sawyer

at

Coral Gables, Florida

on

4 March 1990

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Michael K. Skinner

(Date) 11/26/90

(Revised 24 February 1988)

MICHAEL K. SKINNER

1956	Born in Redmond, Oregon on May 12

Education

1979	BA, Chemistry, Reed College
1982	PhD, Biochemistry, Washington State University

Professional Experience

	University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1982-1984	Post-Doctorate, Reproductive Biology/Biochemistry
1984-Present	Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee
	Assistant Professor, Pharmacology

Honors

1981-1982	Holland Graduate Fellow
1982-1984	Canadian MRC Postdoctoral Fellow
1984	Invited Symposium Speaker at the 7th International Congress of Endocrinology
1986	Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Award

ABSTRACT

Michael K. Skinner grew up in Pendleton, Oregon, the oldest of five boys. His father was an insurance salesman and his mother a housewife. Although he did well in school he was really interested in sports, and wrestled in high school. He wrote a paper on plant biochemistry and decided to be a scientist, knowing even then that he would need a PhD.

Skinner won a wrestling scholarship to Warner Pacific College, but he quit wrestling to have time for studying. His chemistry teacher, William Davis, persuaded Skinner to transfer to Reed College, where he did well. He also shifted his interest from radiation chemistry to biochemistry. During this time, in addition to writing fifteen papers, he married his high-school sweetheart and became a father.

Wanting to be in the lab of a young, enthusiastic professor, Skinner went to Michael Griswold's lab at Washington State University, where he learned biochemistry techniques and picked up molecular biology. He began his life's work in reproductive biology, working in proteins. Finishing his PhD in three years, he continued his focused approach in Irving Fritz's lab at C.H. Best Institute at University of Toronto, learning a great deal of physiology. Skinner worked on Sertoli cells, and he found a mesenchymal conductor in testis. During his postdoc he had seven to ten publications. Skinner was recruited to Vanderbilt University's large, excellent reproductive unit by Marie-Claire Orgebin-Crist. There he is able to continue his research in both testis and ovary.

Skinner discusses funding, one of his pet peeves, the daily demands of running a lab, and the competition with other labs. He believes that the biggest question in science, particularly in his field, is overpopulation. He says that other big questions include gene therapy, immunity, and funding protocols. He expects still to be at the bench in ten years, possibly with industry funding. His wife is a housewife and did not attend college. He keeps his work.

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