# CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

# **STEPHEN J. ELLEDGE**

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview Conducted by

Andrea R. Maestrejuan

at

Baylor College of Medicine Houston, Texas

on

16, 17, and 18 August 1995

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



# Stephen J. Elledge

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is part of a series supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts based on the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences. This collection is an important resource for the history of biomedicine, recording the life and careers of young, distinguished biomedical scientists and of Pew Biomedical Scholar Advisory Committee members.

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Holly Polish, Program Intern, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A. History, American University.

David J. Caruso, Program Manager, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A., History of Science, Medicine, and Technology, Johns Hopkins University; PhD., Science and Technology Studies, Cornell University.

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| : | <u>Stephen J. Elledge</u>       |
|---|---------------------------------|
|   | Department of Biochemistry      |
|   | Howard Hughes Medical Institute |
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Carli V. Rogers (Typed Name)

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# **STEPHEN J. ELLEDGE**

| 1956                                       | Born in Paris, Illinois, on 7 August.   |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
|  | Education   |  |  |  |  |
| 1978                                       | B.S., University of Southampton, Southampton, England and University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign |  |  |  |  |
| 1983                                       | Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology  |  |  |  |  |
| Professional Experience                    |   |  |  |  |  |
| Stanford University, Palo Alto, California |   |  |  |  |  |
| 1984-1989                                  | Postdoctoral Fellow   |  |  |  |  |
| 1000 1002                                  | Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas  |  |  |  |  |
| 1989-1993<br>1993-1995                     | Assistant Professor<br>Associate Professor  |  |  |  |  |
| 1995-present                               | Professor   |  |  |  |  |
| 1993-present                               | Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Chevy Chase, Maryland<br>Associate Investigator                      |  |  |  |  |

# Honors

| 1974-1978 | Illinois State Scholar                                   |
|-----------|--|
| 1974-1978 | James Scholar  |
| 1975      | Monsanto Scholarship-Freshman Chemical Engineering Award |
| 1976      | Chemical Industries Council Scholarship-Sophomore        |
|           | Chemistry Award  |
| 1977      | Elliot Richie Alexander Award                            |
| 1977      | Eta Sigma Phi Honorary Fraternity                        |
| 1978      | Senior Chemistry Award, Phi Lambda Upsilon               |
| 1978      | Bronze Tablet, University of Illinois                    |
| 1984-1987 | Helen Hay Whitney Postdoctoral Fellowship                |
| 1987-1989 | American Cancer Society Senior Fellow                    |
| 1991-1995 | Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant    |
| 1994      | Michael E. DeBakey, M.D., Award for Research Excellence  |
|           |  |

#### Selected Publications

- Elledge, S.J. and G.C. Walker, 1983. Proteins required for UV and chemical mutagenesis: Identification of the products of the *umu*C locus of *Escherichia coli*. *Journal of Molecular Biology*, 164:175-92.
- Elledge, S.J. and R.W. Davis, 1990. Two genes differ-entially regulated in the cell cycle and by DNA-damaging agents encode alternative regulatory subunits of ribonucleotide reductase. *Genes and Development*, 4:740-51.
- Elledge, S.J. et al., 1991. Lambda YES: A multi-functional cDNA expression vector for the isolation of genes by complementation of yeast and *E. coli* mutations. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 88:1731-34.
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- Dulic, V. et al., 1994. p53-dependent inhibition of cyclin-dependent kinase activities in human fibroblasts during radiation-induced G1 arrest. *Cell*, 76:1013-23.
- Allen, J.B. et al., 1994. The SAD1/RAD53 protein kinase controls mutiple cell cycle checkpoints and DNA damage induced transcription in yeast. *Genes and Development*, 8:2401-15.
- Navas, T. et al., 1995. DNA polymerase epsilon links the DNA replication machinery to the S phase checkpoint. *Cell*, 80:29-39.
- Matsuoka, S. et al., 1995. p57<sup>KIP2</sup>, a structurally distinct member of the p21 <sup>CIP1</sup> Cdk-inhibitor family, is a candidate tumor suppressor gene. *Genes and Development*, 9:650-62.
- Sicinski, P. et al., 1995. Cyclin D1 provides a link between development and oncogenesis in the retina and the breast. *Cell*, 82:621-30.
- Deng, C. et al., 1995. Mice lacking p21 <sup>CIP1/WAF1</sup> undergo normal development, but are defective in G1 checkpoint control. *Cell*, 82:675-84.
- Matsuoka, S. et al., 1996. Variable imprinting of the human cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor p57<sup>KIP2</sup>. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 93:3026-30.
- Sanchez, Y. et al., 1996. Regulation of *RAD53* by the ATM-like kinases *MEC1* and *TEL1* in yeast cell cycle checkpoint pathways. *Science*, 271:357-60.

#### ABSTRACT

**Stephen J. Elledge** was born in Paris, Illinois. He had two older sisters and an older half sister. He attended Roman Catholic elementary school but rebelled against the religious teaching and switched to public schools. From a young age, he was interested in science; Elledge's grandmother bought him chemistry kits, and he made rockets. Elledge's high school had very good science and mathematics classes, and he loved chemistry ("fun" he calls it). He was on the chemistry team, on which he won the individual and team competitions.

He was the first in his family to go to college, and he did not have enough guidance to know what he could or should do, so he entered the University of Illinois intending to major in chemical engineering. He won the chemical engineering prize as a freshman, but then switched his major to chemistry. By his junior year he'd taken all the chemistry courses, and recombinant DNA was just becoming the hot topic in biology, so when he went to University of Southampton for his junior year he took a genetics course. During his senior year he took a biochemistry class, which he found combined chemistry and his new interest in biology, and he officially switched to biology for graduate school. He decided to apply to Harvard University for graduate school, but he ended up going to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which people said was the best place in the world. There he worked in Graham Walker's lab, combining molecular biology and genetics. He did his first cloning there and became interested in methodologies for cloning.

Stanford University offered him a postdoc in Ronald Davis' lab, where he first began work in plants, but soon switched to yeast. He became convinced that it was important to find out how cyclin-dependent kinases that run the cell cycle were regulated, with a view toward an intersection between cell cycle and cancer. While at Stanford Elledge met his future wife, Mitzi Kuroda, herself a scientist.

Elledge accepted an assistant professorship at Baylor College of Medicine, where he has since advanced to associate and then full professor. He has brought some technological advances to genetics, and he and his lab discovered inhibitor molecules, especially the tumor suppressor p21, the first mammaliam inhibitor. It was a new field then, but in the few years since publication, Elledge estimates that others have published perhaps a hundred papers on the subject. Elledge himself has continued his interest in what these molecules actually do, now that they have mostly been found. He has been selected a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Associate Investigator; he continues to publish; he has won numerous awards, including the Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Award. Most importantly, he attempts to balance his life at work with his life at home with his wife and two children.

#### **UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY**

#### **INTERVIEWER:**

Andrea R. Maestrejuan, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., History, University of California, Irvine, 1988; B.S., Biological Sciences, University of California, Irvine, 1988; C.Phil., History, University of California, Riverside.

#### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

**Place:** Elledge's office, Baylor College of Medicine.

**Dates, length of sessions:** August 16, 1995 (86 minutes); August 17, 1995 (135); August 18, 1995 (124).

#### Total number of recorded hours: 5.75

Persons present during interview: Elledge and Maestrejuan.

#### 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, Maestrejuan held a telephone preinterview conversation with Elledge to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and to agree on an interviewing schedule. She also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Elledge'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. For general background on the recent history of thebiological sciences, Maestrejuan consulted J.D. Watson et al., *Molecular Biology of the Gene.* 4th ed. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1987, and Bruce Alberts et al., *Molecular Biology of the Cell.* 3rd ed. New York: Garland, 1994.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Elledge's childhood in Paris, Illinois, and continuing through his graduate work at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, his postdoc at Stanford University, and the establishment of his own lab at Baylor College of Medicine.

Major topics discussed include the discovery of cyclin-dependent kinase 2, work on DNA damage response, the intersection of cell cycle and cancer studies, technological advances Elledge has brought to genetics, and funding in the scientific community.

#### **ORIGINAL EDITING:**

Mimi Luc, editorial assistant, 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.

Elledge reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Kristian London, assistant editor, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history.

Kathleen McAlister, editorial assistant, compiled the index..

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Early Years   | 1  |
|---|----|
| Family background. Growing up in small-town Midwest. Early interest in science. Early interest in science. Chemistry kits. Chemistry team in high school. Detasseling corn.   |    |
| College Years   | 22 |
| Matriculates at University of Illinois. Majors in chemical engineering and wins<br>chemical engineering prize, but switches to chemistry after first year. Summer<br>jobs. Loves learning, especially mathematics and chemistry. Straight A's.<br>Junior year at University of Southampton in Southampton, England. Becomes<br>interested in genetics. Comparison of English and American systems. Finishes<br>in three and one-half years but stays at school. Takes biochemistry.   |    |
| Graduate School Years   | 68 |
| Switches to biology. Enters Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "the best place anywhere." Studies genetics. Graham Walker's lab. Cloning. New technologies for cloning. Finishes PhD in four years. Spends an extra year at MIT.  |    |
| Postgraduate Years  | 82 |
| Accepts postdoc at Stanford University in Ronald Davis' lab. Decides he is not interested in plants and switches to yeast. Meets future wife, Mitzi Kuroda. Cell-cycle regulation. DNA damage response. Marries.  |    |
| Faculty Years   | 92 |
| Accepts assistant professorship at Baylor College of Medicine. Moves through<br>associate professorship to full professorship. Tumor suppressor p21. Continuing<br>importance of cyclin-dependent kinase 2. Competition and collaboration.<br>Sexism in science. Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences award. Other<br>awards. Cell cycle and cancer. Writing grants. Publishing ("rat race").<br>Managing his lab. Balancing life with wife and two children with life in the lab. |    |
|   |    |

Index

119

# 3

**3**, 76, 80, 87, 92, 97 **3** GT-11 system, 82

## A

AA. See Alcoholics Anonymous Agrobacterium, 96
AIDS. See autoimmune deficiency syndrome
Alcoholics Anonymous, 4, 8
Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 60
Arabidopsis, 97
Austria, 60, 61
autoimmune deficiency syndrome, 108, 109

# B

Baber, Bruce, 23, 25, 57, 95 Baber, Mary Helen, 23 Baker, Bruce S., 101 Baltimore, David, 79 Barry, Mr., 22 Bass, Brenda L., 118 Baylor College of Medicine, 85 **Baylor University**, 99 Beach, David, 37, 38, 43, 44, 45 Becherer, Kathleen, 87 Behrman, Amy, 114 Berkeley, California, 100 Berlin Wall, 62 Berlin, Germany, 62 biochemistry, 19, 51, 63, 64, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 80, 81, 83, 86, 89, 98 Bjorkman, Pamela J., 118 Boston, Massachusetts, 38, 40, 93 Botstein, David, 79, 82 Brent, Roger, 40 Brown, Barbara Ann Elledge (sister), 3 Brown, Dave (brother-in-law), 7, 27

# С

California Institute of Technology, 70, 73, 75 Caltech. See California Institute of Technology Cambridge, England, 61 Cambridge, Massachusetts, 93 cancer suppressor p16, 45 Case Western Reserve University, 92 cdc2, 84, 85 cdc28, 85 Cdk2. See cyclin-dependent kinase 2 Cdk-interacting protein 1, 43, 87 cell cycle, 37, 38, 41, 43, 44, 46, 47, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 88, 110 Champaign, Illinois, 62, See Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, 1 Charleston, Illinois, 11 Checkpoint Charlie, 62 Chicago, Illinois, 1, 21, 24, 28, 54, 55, 56, 57.95 Christopher Curl, 14 Cip1. See Cdk-interacting protein 1 Colson's Printing Company, 3 Cooper, Jonathan A., 42 Corsica, 60, 61 cyclin-dependent kinase 2, 43, 85, 86, 87 cyclin-dependent kinases, 37, 38, 43

## D

Davis, Mona Elledge (cousin), 13
Davis, Ronald W., 13, 33, 81, 82, 92, 96, 99
Deng, Chuxia, 44
DePauw University, 57
DNA, 19, 38, 40, 44, 46, 47, 72, 73, 74, 75, 80, 82, 83, 86, 87, 96, 110, 111
cDNA, 84, 85, 87
DNA polymerase €, 87
Dollar, Brenda Lee Elledge (sister), 3, 8,

9, 96 Drosophila, 87 Dudley, England, 11 Dudley, Illinois, 11, 23 DUN1, 38, 87 Durfee, Timothy, 87

# E

*E. coli*, 40, 81, 83, 110
East Germany, 62
Edgar County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council, 4
Edward, Michael C., 85, 87
Eichele, Gregor, 88
Elledge, Daniel (son), 102, 103
Elledge, Joseph (father), 2, 95
Elledge, Julia (paternal great-aunt), 2, 13, 14
Elledge, Lucky (paternal great-uncle), 2
Elledge, Sarah Greco (mother), 2, 3
Elledge, Susanna (daughter), 102, 103
England, 57
enzymatic mechanisms, 19, 63, 71, 72

# F

Fermat's last theorem, 32 Fields, Stanley, 43, 86 Fink, Gerald R., 82 Florida, 8, 59 Ford Motor Company, 7, 27 France, 60

# G

Gal4, 86 genetics, 19, 41, 43, 47, 51, 63, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 80, 81, 88, 89, 91, 101, 102, 110, 113 Germany, 60, 62 Gibson, Mr., 22 Gonzalez, Robert, 64 Goodman, Steve, 54 Gore, Albert, Jr., 55 Gottschling, Daniel E., 118 Grateful Dead, 100 Greenville, Mississippi, 2

#### Η

Harlow, Edward, 85, 87 Harper, J. Wade, 39, 43, 86, 87, 99 Hartwell, Leland H., 82 Harvard University, 19, 38, 70, 71, 75, 106 HIV. See human immunodeficiency virus HO gene, 83 Hobart, Billi Joyce Greco (half-sister), 3, 5, 7, 8 Hobart, Robert (brother-in-law), 7 Holifield, Carl (paternal step-grandfather), 3 Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 87, 99, 105, 106 Human Genome Project, 73, 109 human immunodeficiency virus, 86 Hunter, Anthony R., 38

# I

Illinois, 8, 10 Illinois Cereal Mill, 65 Indiana, 1, 22, 49, 57 Indiana State University, 54 Ireland, 2, 61 Italy, 2, 5, 60

# J

Jacks, Tyler, 44 Joliet, Illinois, 3, 13

# K

Kentucky, 8 Kenyon, Cynthia, 40, 41, 94, 115 Kirschner, Marc W., 38 Kiwanis Club, 57 Kleckner, Nancy, 90 Knowles, Jeremy R., 19 Kuhn, Thomas S., 79, 111 Kuroda, Mitzi, 86, 92, 101, 103

## L

Lamb, Casey, 95 Landis, Clark, 54, 57 Leder, Philip, 44 Lee, Melanie G., 91, 96 Leland, Mississippi, 2, 3, 5 Lewin, Benjamin, 38 Little Rock, Arkansas, 6 Lodish, Harvey F., 79 London, England, 38, 57, 61

## Μ

M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, 7
Marshall, Illinois, 3
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 19, 51, 52, 70, 72, 73, 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 93, 96, 106, 110
Mattoon, Illinois, 11
McKenry, A.J., 22
Menlo Park, California, 101
Meyers, Barbara J., 96
Mississippi, 5, 57
MIT. See Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Monsanto Company, 54
Montgomery Ward, 21
Mulligan, John, 84

# N

Nasmyth, Kim A., 83 National Institutes of Health, 104, 105, 106, 107 Nester, Eugene W., 96 New Orleans, Louisiana, 57 *New York Times*, 39, 107 Nguyen, Thanh, 97 NIH. *See* National Institutes of Health NIH Office of Aids Research, 109 Nobel Prize, 41, 78, 81 Nurse, Paul, 43, 82, 84, 85, 91

## 0

Oblong, Illinois, 11, 12 Olney, Illinois, 10, 11, 12

# P

p57, 88 Palo Alto, California, 100, 101 Paris Automobile Company, 21 Paris, France, 60
Paris, Illinois, 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 28, 29, 54, 55, 60, 65, 95, 96
Pauling, Linus C., 19
PCR. *See* polymerase chain reaction
Pew Charitable Trusts, 117
Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences, 47, 99, 105, 110
phasmid, 81
polymerase chain reaction, 37
Ptashne, Mark, 40

# R

Ramer, Sandra W., 84
REA. See Rural Electrification Administration
RecA, 82
Reed, Steven I., 43, 85, 86
retinoblastoma, 42, 87
ribonucleotide reductase, 82, 83, 87
Rice University, 52
RNA, 83, 86
Roman Catholic/Catholicism, 2, 4, 9, 14, 22, 49
Rural Electrification Administration, 3
Russia, 62

# S

Saccharomyces cerevisiae, 43 Saint Mary's [elementary school], 20, 22 San Francisco, California, 100 Scotland, 61 Seattle, Washington, 96 Sheffield, England, 61 Sicily, 2 Signer, Ethan, 110 simian virus 40, 88 Smith, James R., 43, 108 Soriano, Philippe M., 46 Southern blot, 36 src, 46 Stanford University, 48, 70, 81, 83, 94, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101 Stidle, Steve, 20 Stillman, David, 83

Structure of Scientific Revolutions, The, 111
Strugala, Lisa, 57
Sugino, Akio, 88
SV40. See simian virus 40
Swindle, Ann, 60

#### Т

Tatara, Richard, 54, 57, 59, 95 Terre Haute, Indiana, 1, 28, 29, 54, 57 Theresa Gagen (paternal grandmother), 2 transposon, 40, 80 tumor suppressor, 38, 42, 44, 45 p21, 37, 43, 44, 87, 88 p53, 38, 42, 43, 44, 87

## U

UCSF. See University of California, San Francisco umuC, 40, 76 United States Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, 5 University of California, Berkeley, 70, 100, 106 University of California, San Diego, 101 University of California, San Francisco, 84, 106 University of Chicago, 23 University of Illinois, 1, 7, 19, 28, 51, 54, 56, 58, 63, 69 University of Iowa, 92 University of Southampton, 57, 59, 63 University of Texas, 7, 107 University of Washington, 96 University of Wisconsin, 70

#### V

Vallee, Bert L., 86 Varmus, Harold E., 42 Veterans Administration, 10 Vienna, Austria, 57, 61, 62 Vietnam War, 15 Vogelstein, Bert, 38, 43, 47, 87

## W

Wales, 61
Walker, Graham C., 40, 64, 72, 73, 80, 93, 99
Walsh, Christopher, 72
Weinberg, Amy, 55
Weinberg, Robert A., 42
Wharton, Robin P., 40
Willow Hill, Illinois, 11
Wishart, David, 54, 55, 63
World War II, 2

# Х

X YES, 84 Xiong, Yue, 43

# Y

Yanofsky, Charles, 101 Young, Richard, 96

## Z

Zhou, Z., 38 Zinn, Kai, 118