CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

WILMA M. WASCO

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, Massachusetts

on

2, 3, and 4 October 2002

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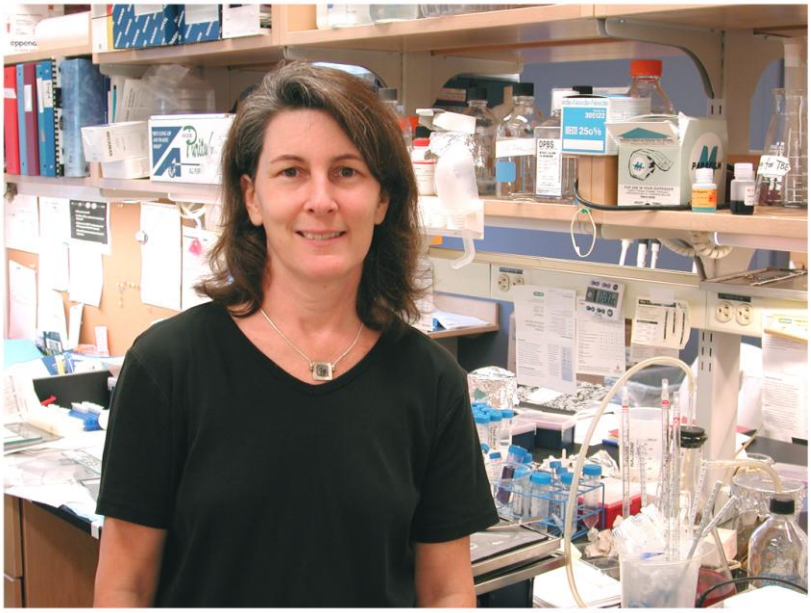

Wilma M. Wasco

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REFORMATTING:

Kim Phan, Program Intern, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A. expected 2011, Anthropology, Cornell 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.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

Oral History Interview Agreement No. R110502I

This Interview Agreement is made and entered into this 5 day of November, 2002 by and between THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, a California corporation, on behalf of the Oral History Program at the UCLA campus, hereinafter called "University," and WILMA M. WASCO, having an address at Neurology Department, Massachusetts General Hospital, Building 114, 114 16th Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts 02129-9142, hereinafter called "Interviewee."

Interviewee agrees to participate in a series of University-conducted tape-recorded interviews, commencing on or about October 2, 2002, and tentatively entitled "Interview with Wilma M. Wasco. This Agreement relates to any and all materials originating from the interviews, namely the tape recordings of the interviews and a written manuscript prepared from the tapes, hereinafter collectively called "the Work."

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereto hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to University all her copyright, title and interest in and to the Work. This assignment applies to University, its successors, and assigns, for and during the existence of the copyright and all renewals and extensions thereof.

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4. Interviewee will receive from University, free of charge, one bound copy of the typewritten manuscript of the interviews.

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6. All notices and other official correspondence concerning this Agreement will be sent to the following:

If to University:

Oral History Program
University of California, Los Angeles
Box 951575
Los Angeles, California 90095-1575

Attention: Janice L. Reiff

If to Interviewee:

Wilma M. Wasco
Neurology Department
Massachusetts General Hospital
114 16th Street
Charlestown, MA 02129-9142

University and Interviewee have executed this Agreement on the date first written above.

INTERVIEWEE	THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
X Wilma M. Wasco (Signature)	Janice L. Reiff (Signature)
Wilma M. Wasco (Typed Name)	Janice L. Reiff (Typed Name)
Neurology Department (Address)	Interim Director, Oral History Program (Title)
Massachusetts General Hospital	
114 16th Street	
Charlestown, MA 02129-9142	
X Date 10/2/02	Date 5 NOV 2002

Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

WILMA M. WASCO

1959 Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on 18 August

Education

1981 B.S., Biology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut
1983 M.S., Molecular Pharmacology, Albert Einstein College of Medicine
1987 Ph.D., Molecular Pharmacology, Albert Einstein College of Medicine

Professional Experience

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
1987-1991 Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Cancer Research, Department of Biology

Harvard University
1991-1993 Research Fellow, Department of Neurology
1993-1994 Instructor, Department of Neurology
1994-present Assistant Professor, Department of Neurology

Massachusetts General Hospital
1991-1993 Research Fellow, Neurology Service
1993-present Assistant Geneticist, Neurology Service

Honors

1987 National Research Service Award
1993 Becton-Dickinson Research Fellowship Award
1997-2001 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant
2000 MGH Women's Career Faculty Development Award

Selected Publications

Wasco, W.M. and Orr, G.A. (1984) Function of calmodulin in mammalian sperm: presence of a calmodulin-dependent cyclic nucleotide phosphodiesterase associated with demembranated rat caudal epididymal sperm. *Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun.* 118:636-642.

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** The first two authors contributed equally to this publication.*

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ABSTRACT

Wilma M. Wasco was raised in Fairfield, Connecticut—a town about forty-five minutes away from New York City—the oldest of three siblings. Her father was a lawyer and had a profound love of jazz music, also, later in life, he suffered from multiple sclerosis; her mother worked for a telephone company until her children were born and then, when older, pursued an interest in her own artistic expression. Wasco loved to read and play as a child, and for a time took music lessons from a jazz-artist who was a friend of her father. Her family was close-knit: they often took day trips together around the state. After some time in parochial school, Wasco entered the public system for junior high and high schools. She first became interested in science in the eighth grade due to a teacher, Mr. Somaski, but she was still uncertain of what career she wanted to pursue.

She chose to attend the University of Connecticut for her undergraduate degree. Due to registration difficulties she was unable to enroll in science classes until her sophomore year, at which point she took an honors chemistry course, interesting her in science; she chose her major (biology) in her junior year, and only then began taking biology courses. While still an undergraduate she worked for Guillermo Fallar, a neuroscientist, and Ian McClellan, biochemist, in a neurobiology laboratory and she decided to go to graduate school. She wanted to study molecular pharmacology and she applied to and was accepted at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. While there she conducted her thesis research with George A. Orr, with whom she published her first paper, on calmodulin. From New York she moved on to a postdoctoral position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, working with Frank Solomon on microtubular-associated proteins, specifically identifying and characterizing amyloid precursor-like protein 1 (APLP1); during her studies she received a National Research Service Award. She then became a Research Fellow in the neurology department at Harvard University and held a joint position with Massachusetts General Hospital, at which time she was working with Rudolph E. Tanzi (Pew Scholar Class of 1993) on cloning amyloid precursor-like protein 1 (APLP1). Wasco remained at Harvard University, becoming an assistant professor researching neuronal cell death in normal and neurodegenerative cells with implications for Alzheimer's disease research, and becoming an assistant geneticist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

The interview ends with Wasco discussing her work on presenilin 2; her research on calsenilin and amyloid precursor-like proteins, the long- and short-term applications of her work; and her opinion of biomedical research funding in the United States. She concludes with thoughts on balancing family and career; the privatization of scientific research; competition and collaboration in science; the national agenda for science; scientists and public policy; science literacy in the United States; and the role of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences in her work.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

William Van Benschoten, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., History, University of California, Riverside; M.A., History, University of California, Riverside; C. Phil., History, UCLA

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Wasco's office, Massachusetts General Hospital.

Dates, length of sessions: October 2, 2002; October 3, 2002; and October 4, 2002.

Total number of recorded hours: 5.0

Persons present during interview: Wasco 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 Wanda Wasco to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Wasco's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including the proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol L. 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.

Wasco did not review the transcript. Consequently, many proper names remain unverified.

Carol L. Squires prepared the table of contents. Victoria Simmons compiled the

interview history. TechniType Transcriptions compiled the index.

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