

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

BARBARA PANNING

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Hilary Domush

at

University of California, San Francisco
San Francisco, California

on

27 and 28 August 2008

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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 Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Advisory Committee members.

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BARBARA PANNING

1963 Born in Chur, Switzerland on 17 August

Education

1986 BSc., McMaster University, Ontario, Canada, Biology
1994 PhD, McMaster University, Ontario, Canada, Medical Sciences

Professional Experience

1994-1997 Whitehead Institute, MIT, Boston, Massachusetts
Postdoctorate, Developmental Genetics

1997-1999 Center for Cancer Research, MIT, Boston, Massachusetts
Postdoctorate, Biochemistry

1999-2008 University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, California
Assistant Professor, Biochemistry & Biophysics
2008-present Associate Professor, Biochemistry & Biophysics

Honors

1985-1986 McMaster University Senate Scholarship
1989-1993 McMaster University Centennial Fellowship
1989-1993 National Cancer Institute of Canada, Steve Fonyo Studentship
1994-1997 Canadian Medical Research Council Research Fellowship
1997-1999 Canadian Medical Research Council Centennial Fellowship
2002-2006 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences

ABSTRACT

Barbara Panning was born in Switzerland, one of three children. The family moved to Toronto, Canada, when Barbara was a young child, but Barbara continued to summer in Switzerland. She had an idyllic childhood and always loved science. Panning attended McMaster University, majoring in biology and anthropology. Her senior project involved work on Roberts syndrome in Darrell Tomkins's lab. She continued at McMaster for her PhD, advised by James Smiley, working on herpes virus and adenovirus and publishing a number of papers. Panning began work on X-inactivation in Rudolf Jaenisch's lab at the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), moving to Philip Sharp's lab at MIT to complete her postdoctoral work. She also married during this time.

Panning accepted an assistant professorship at the University of California, San Francisco, where the complexity of X-inactivation continues to intrigue her: X chromosomes seem to talk to each other so that they know how to silence one of them; people don't end up with zero or two X chromosomes. How does this happen? When? How does an X chromosome get silenced in the proper twelve-hour time frame? How does DNA get packaged into chromatin for regulation of gene expression? These are the questions with which Panning still wrestles.

Panning discusses funding in general and her funding, specifically the Pew Scholars award; the necessity for publishing in top-tier journals versus public-access sites; teaching and other administrative duties and their effect on her lab time; balancing family life with work; lab management and the composition of her lab; and women in science and accommodations for children. She laments the decline in funding for science and the general science illiteracy, ruminating on the possibility of a science "ambassador." In addition to long hours in the lab, Panning is involved in outreach to minority students and helps at her child's school.

INTERVIEWER

Hilary Domush was a Program Associate in the Center for Oral History at CHF from 2007-2015. Previously, she earned a BS in chemistry from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine in 2003. She then completed an MS in chemistry and an MA in history of science both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her graduate work in the history of science focused on early nineteenth-century chemistry in the city of Edinburgh, while her work in the chemistry was in a total synthesis laboratory. At CHF, she worked on projects such as the Pew Biomedical Scholars, Women in Chemistry, Atmospheric Science, and Catalysis.

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