

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

SANDRA J.F. DEGEN

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Susan M. Lindee and Sarah Goldfine

at

Coronado, California

on

3 March 1991

{ With subsequent corrections and additions }

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Sandra J.F. Degen

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SANDRA J.F. DEGEN

1955 Born in Glendale, California on 15 January

Education

1976 B.A., with honors, Chemistry, University of California,
San Diego (Revelle College)

1982 Ph.D., Biochemistry, University of Washington

Professional Experience

1983 University of Washington
Senior Fellow

1983-1985 Friedrich Meister-Institut, Basel, Switzerland
Senior Fellow

1985-present University of Cincinnati Medical Center
Assistant Professor of Pediatrics

Honors

1977-1978 NIH Predoctoral Fellowship

1978 Elected membership in the American Chemical Society

1987-1991 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences

1989 Elected membership in the American Society of Hematology

1989 Elected membership in American Society for Biochemistry
and Molecular Biology

1990 Special Reviewer for NIH Hematology I Study Section

1990-present Established Investigator of the American Heart Association

Selected Publications

Doolittle, R.F., Cassman, K.G., Cottrell, B.A., Friezner, S.J., Hucko, J.T., and Takagi, "T. Amino acid sequence studies on the α chain of human fibrinogen. Characterization of 11 cyanogen bromide fragments," *Biochemistry* 16 (1977): 1703-9.

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ABSTRACT

Sandra J.F. Degen grew up in the San Fernando Valley, outside of Los Angeles, California, one of four children. Her father was a scientist and her mother a seamstress and homemaker. She says her childhood was an ordinary happy one. She did well in school but did not decide on science as a career until college. There was no religion in the family.

It was expected that the children would go to college, and Sandra chose the University of California, San Diego. Originally she had thought to major in mathematics, but in her second year she decided to switch to chemistry. Sandra entered Russell Doolittle's lab, where she worked on fibrinogen. She found Doolittle to be very helpful and supportive. She met Jay Degen, who was also a chemistry student, and they married right after college.

On Doolittle's advice the Degens both entered graduate school at the University of Washington, Sandra in Earl Davie's lab. Sandra worked under Kazuo Fujikawa for three unsuccessful years before changing projects and completing her PhD thesis on human prothrombin. She compares her confident attitude with her husband's and points out that both have succeeded.

Edward Reich, who had just left Rockefeller University for Meischer Institut in Basel, Switzerland, recruited both Degens for his lab. They spent two years there, working, writing some papers, and doing some travelling. At that point they were ready to return to the United States and to find jobs, always more complicated with both spouses being scientists.

They were pursued by three institutions, most aggressively by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, where both ultimately accepted assistant professorships in the pediatrics department and where both have progressed through tenure reviews to professorships. Sandra has good funding; her lab is small but growing; her work is going well. She talks about her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter and how difficult it is to find as much time as she would like to spend playing with her. She discusses her lab management philosophy. She explains that she loves her science but that she also enjoys the administrative duties involved and says that in ten years she may want to be doing more of the administration or perhaps something altogether different.

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