

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

ELLEN PURÉ

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Robert Kohler and Naomi Morrissette

at

Rockefeller University

on

21 August 1989

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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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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ELLEN PURÉ

1957 Born in New York, New York, on March 18

Education

1977 AB, Biology, Washington University
1981 PhD, Immunology, University of Texas Health Science Center

Professional Experience

1982-1984 The Rockefeller University, New York, NY
1984-Present Post-Doctorate, Cellular Physiology and Immunology
Assistant Professor

Honors

1981 Nominata Award, University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
1982-1984 Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Postdoctoral Fellow
1983-Present Harvey Society Active Member
1984-Present American Association of Immunologists
1984-1986 Leukemia Society of America Special Fellow
1984-1987 NIH New Investigator Research Award
1985 Pew Scholar Award

ABSTRACT

Ellen Puré grew up in Queens, New York, the youngest of three children. Her parents were Polish survivors of concentration camps. Her father was a carpenter who designed and built store interiors. Always interested in science and math, Ellen attended Bronx High School of Science. She chose Washington University in St. Louis, though it was outside her parents' hundred-mile limit, because it had good lab science programs for undergraduates. She started as a chemistry major but switched to biology after a class with David Kirk. As a sophomore she worked on the metabolism of prostaglandins in Philip Needleman's lab. She was intrigued by the effects of receptors on the regulation of cell growth and differentiation, the specificity and memory of the immune system, and the communication among T-cells.

A talk by Ellen Vitetta on surface Ig persuaded Puré to attend graduate school at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center to work on IgM and IgD, exploring why there are two antigen receptors and how they differ. Next, Puré accepted a Damon Runyon Fellowship at Rockefeller University, where she worked on monoclonal antibodies and the Fc receptor. Puré continues at Rockefeller as a faculty member. Her lab has three focuses: cell surface receptors in lymphokines, memory in B-cells, and B-lymphocytes as antigen-presenting cells. Her major collaborator is Ralph Steinman.

Puré talks about acquiring disparate, specific skills in order to be able to understand the whole of complex problems. She explains how the Pew grant helped her in this regard. She names people who have had a major influence on her. She describes the personal pleasure she takes in her collaborations with colleagues and students. She hopes to continue working at the bench. She aspires to a more permanent position at an excellent institution with excited, enthusiastic colleagues. She finishes the interview by describing her administrative duties and her work at *Journal of Experimental Medicine*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	1
<p>Grew up in Queens, New York, youngest of three children. Parents from Poland, survivors of concentration camps. Father carpenter, designs and builds stores' interiors. Early interest in science. Attended Bronx High School of Science.</p>	
College Years	5
<p>Washington University in St. Louis; chemistry major. Started research as sophomore. David Kirk excellent teacher; decision to switch to biology. Working on metabolism of prostaglandins in Philip Needleman's lab. Neurobiology with W. Maxwell Cowan and Dale Purves; immunology with Joseph Davie and Julian Fleischman. Receptor-mediated regulation of cell growth and differentiation. Specificity and memory of immune system. Philip Leder's early work. Communication of T-cells.</p>	
Graduate School Years	11
<p>Pharmacology and immunology. Ellen Vitetta on surface Ig. Vitetta's lab at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. Influenced by David Parker; Fred Finkelman and James Mond. Polyclonal system in mouse activated through Ig. Peter Krammer. Using Max Delbrück and Salvador Luria's work from 1940s. Working on lymphokines. Collaboration with Krammer, Vitetta, and Peter Isakson.</p>	
Postdoctoral Work	18
<p>Wanted good lab with receptor work; inspired by Jay Unkeless' work on monoclonal antibodies and Fc receptor; chose Rockefeller University. Damon Runyon Fellowship on role of Fc receptors on B-cells using monoclonal antibody. Two years as postdoc.</p>	
Faculty Position at Rockefeller University	22
<p>Lab small and collaborative. Pew grant allowed return to T-cells and B-cells; gave her time to reinforce her molecular biology and biochemistry skills. Working on: defining cell surface receptors involved in lymphokine binding and responses or cell-cell interactions; memory in B-cells; and B-lymphocytes as antigen-presenting cells. Collaboration with Ralph Steinman.</p>	
General Thoughts	25
<p>Thinking more about context now. Acquiring specific skills throughout career in order to understand whole problem. Major influences. Personal aspects of collaborations. Hopes in five or ten years. Wants to be at excellent institution, with enthusiastic people and good postdocs. Discusses administrative duties, <i>Journal of Experimental Medicine</i>.</p>	
Index	31

INDEX

A

arachidonic acid, 7, 11

B

Barnard College, 5

B-cell, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27

Białystok, Poland, 1

Biology Today, 6

Birkeland, Marian, 24, 25

Blue Ridge Mountains, 21

Blumberg, Alan L., 6, 7

Boime, Irving, 10

Boston, Massachusetts, 5

Bronx High School of Science, 2, 4, 6, 9

Brooklyn Technical High School, 1

Brown, Michael S., 18

C

Cambier, John C., 12

Chicago, Illinois, 5

Coffman, Robert L., 16

Cohen, Stanley, 18

collaboration, 16, 17, 22, 25, 27

competition, 22, 29

Cowan, William Maxwell, 8, 9

D

Dallas, Texas, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18

Damon Runyon Fellowship, 20

Davie, Joseph M., 9, 11

Delbrück, Max, 16

DNA, 10, 15

Duke University, 24

Dutton, Richard W., 15

E

Eidels, Leon, 14

Europe, 1

F

Fc receptor, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, 11

Finkelman, Fred D., 12, 13

Fleischman, Julian B., 9

Forman, Mark, 24

Frankel, Mrs., 3

G

G.D. Searle & Co., 9

Germany, 16, 17, 20

Gluck, Mr., 4

grants/funding, 29, 30

H

Hart, David A., 12

Howard, Maureen, 16

I

IgD. *See* immunoglobulin D

IgE. *See* immunoglobulin E

IgG. *See* immunoglobulin G

IgM. *See* immunoglobulin M

IL-4 [interleukin-4], 16

immunoglobulin, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23

immunoglobulin D, 12, 13, 14

immunoglobulin E, 16

immunoglobulin G, 16, 19

immunoglobulin M, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

Isakson, Peter C., 15, 17

Ishizaka, Kimishige, 18

Israel, 1, 3

J

JEM. *See* Journal of Experimental Medicine

Johns Hopkins University, 18

Journal of Experimental Medicine, 16, 19, 25, 30

K

Kirk, David L., 6

Kishimoto, Tadimitsu, 15, 27
Krammer, Peter H., 15, 16, 17, 20
Kunkel, Henry, 14

L

Leder, Philip, 10
Lipsky, Peter E., 12
Luria, Salvador E., 16
lymphokines, 10, 17, 18, 19, 23, 25, 27

M

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, 21
Metzger, Henry, 18
Mond, James, 12, 13
Monsanto Company, 6

N

National Academy of Sciences, 8
National Institutes of Health, 18
Needleman, Philip, 6, 7, 9, 17, 27
New York City, New York, 4, 5, 19
New York Hospital, 18
New York University, 20
NIH. *See* National Institutes of Health

P

Parker, David C., 12, 14, 15
Paul, William E., 16
Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences, 21, 23
Portnoy, Daniel A., 29
Poznań, Poland, 1
publish/publication, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 30
Purves, Dale, 8
Putnam, C.W., 14

Q

Queens, New York, 2

R

Ravetch, Jeffrey V., 21, 22
RNA, 21
Rockefeller University, 14, 18, 21, 25, 26

S

Salk Institute for Biological Studies, 8
Schimpl, Anneliese, 15
Schwartz, Benjamin D., 12
Smith Kline and French, 6
South America, 1
Special Programs, 4
St. Louis, Missouri, 5
State University of New York, 6
 Binghamton-Harper, 6
 Potsdam, 6
Steinman, Ralph M., 24, 25, 27, 28
Stuyvesant High School, 2

T

T-cell, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 25, 27
T-dependent, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
TNP, 13

U

Uhr, Jonathan W., 17
United States of America, 1
University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 12
Unkeless, Jay C., 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27

V

Vanderbilt University, 18
Virginia, 21
Vitetta, Ellen S., 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 27

W

Washington University in St. Louis, 5, 6, 8, 12, 26
Wecker, Eberhard, 15
Worcester, Massachusetts, 12
World War II, 1, 3

X

Xenopus, 21

Z

Zionism, 3