

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**RICHARD I. DORSKY**

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Hilary L. Domush

at

University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, Utah

on

15 and 16 July 2009

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

## 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 Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Advisory Committee members.

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## **RICHARD I. DORSKY**

1969 Born in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, on 15 January

### Education

1990 B.A., Molecular Biology, University of California, Berkeley  
1996 Ph.D., Biology, University of California, San Diego

### Professional Experience

1996-2001 University of Washington, Seattle, Washington  
Postdoctorate, Developmental Biology

2001-2008 University of Utah  
Assistant Professor, Neurobiology and Anatomy  
2008-present Associate Professor, Neurobiology and Anatomy

### Honors

1985-1990 National Merit Scholarship  
1986-1990 University of California, Berkeley, Chancellor's Scholarship  
1992-1995 National Science Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship  
1998 National Research Service Award, National Institutes of Health  
1998-2001 Howard Hughes Postdoctoral Fellowship  
2003-2007 Pew Scholar Award in the Biomedical Sciences

## ABSTRACT

**Richard I. Dorsky** grew up in Palo Alto, California. His father was a chemist; his mother was a computer programmer. Dorsky always liked to understand how things worked, and his father promoted Dorsky's early interest in science with simple experiments at home and trips to the chemistry lab. Strong associations with Stanford University faculty and their children further encouraged a strong academic leaning. An outstanding biology teacher in high school turned Dorsky's interest in chemistry to a love of biology.

Dorsky entered the University of California, Berkeley, where he majored in molecular biology; he worked in Mark Davis's lab at Stanford University and did summer lab work with Peter Schultz. During his junior year Dorsky injured his knee while skiing for the ski team; after surgery on his knee, he spent some of his recovery time travelling in Europe. He loved Corey Goodman's developmental neurobiology class and entered Goodman's lab, where he wrote his honors thesis with Alex Kolodkin; after his graduation he spent a further year as a technician in Goodman's lab while he considered graduate schools.

For his PhD, Dorsky entered William Harris's lab at University of California, San Diego, where he immediately won a National Science Foundation grant and began working on notch function gene in the retina. He met his future wife and followed her to Sydney, Australia, where he spent six months in David Rapaport's lab. While deciding on a postdoc Dorsky became interested Wnt signaling and zebrafish. He accepted a position at the University of Washington, where he worked in two labs, David Raible's and Randall Moon's. There he researched Wnt signaling and continued writing and publishing papers. He left Washington for an assistant professorship at the University of Utah.

At the end of the interview he talks about the community of zebrafish scholars, its friendliness and willingness to share; its rapid growth; and its usefulness as a proxy for understanding human brains. He takes the interviewer on a tour of his facility (6,000 tanks shared by eighteen labs) and describes how the University controls access and training. Dorsky talks about the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences grant and the annual meetings. He discusses recruiting students and postdocs; his lab management style; his own bench work; his teaching duties; his administrative commitments; collaborations; and more about publishing and journal hierarchy. Dorsky explains how understanding the zebrafish's brain will lead to understanding human neurogenesis. He concludes his interview by describing how he attempts to balance his family life with life in the lab.

## INTERVIEWER

**Hilary L. Domush** earned a B.S. in chemistry from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine in 2003. Since then she has completed a M.S. in chemistry and a M.A. in history of science both from the University of Wisconsin. 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. Hilary is currently Program Associate for Oral History at CHF, where she combines these two divergent academic paths. Her current work focuses on the Pew Biomedical Scholars and Women in Chemistry oral history projects. She also contributes to the podcast *Distillations* and the magazine *Chemical Heritage*.

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