

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

YUSUF A. HANNUN

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Neil D. Hathaway

at

Duke University Medical Center & The Home of Yusuf Hannun
Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina

on

29, 30 March and 1, 2 April 1993

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Yusuf A. Hannun

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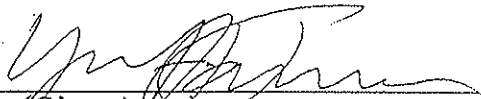
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YUSUF A. HANNUN

1955 Born in Dahran, Saudi Arabia, on 18 September

Education

1977 B.Sc., Biology/Chemistry, American University of Beirut
1981 M.D., American University of Beirut

Professional Experience

Duke University Medical Center
1983-1986 Hematology/Oncology Fellow
1987-1992 Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
1989-1992 Assistant Professor, Department of Cell Biology
1992-present Associate Professor, Department of Medicine

Honors

1980 Alpha Omega Alpha
1985-1990 Physician Scientist Award, National Institutes of Health
1988-1992 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant
1990-1995 Established Investigator Award, American Heart Association
1990-1993 Mallinckrodt Scholar
1991 American Society for Clinical Investigation
1992 R. Wayne Rundles Award for Excellence in Cancer Research

Selected Publications

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ABSTRACT

Yusuf A. Hannun was born in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, though raised after the age of five in Beirut, Lebanon, the eldest of three siblings. His father was a medical officer in the British Army during the World War II and later became a physician at the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) stationed in Saudi Arabia and then started his own private practice in Lebanon. Hannun's parents believed wholeheartedly in education; Hannun attended the International College in Beirut for his studies. He always excelled in school and had a broad-based education with an emphasis, and an interest for Hannun, in the sciences and mathematics. He was an avid reader and a competitive swimmer, and he knew from a young age that he was going to pursue a career in medicine, even if it served as a fallback to some other area of study. Hannun began to notice political tensions within the country at the end of high school, and subconsciously decided to undertake his career abroad.

He studied medicine at the American University of Beirut, specializing in internal medicine. He decided not to stay in the Middle East and took a subspecialty in oncology/hematology at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, at which point he decided to focus on biomedical research. He studied the connection between protein kinase C and diacylglycerol with James E. Neidel and Robert M. Bell, after which he received a National Institutes of Health Physician Scientist Award and began his work on sphingolipids and protein kinase C while remaining at Duke.

Much of the interview is spent discussing the cultural, social, and political life of Lebanon, the civil war, and Hannun's comparison of life in the United States to life in Lebanon, and some time is spent discussing the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The interview concludes with Hannun's thoughts on labs that combine a structural and functional approach to science; the justification for doing basic research; his Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award; and the politics of funding. He ends with a discussion of National Institutes of Health peer reviewers; his research on protein kinase C; his family; his collaboration with his wife, Lina Obeid Hannun; and women and minorities in science.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Neil D. Hathaway, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., English and History, Georgetown University; M.A. and C. Phil., History, UCLA

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Tapes I-II & V-VII - Hannun's office, Duke University Medical Center.
Tapes III-IV – Hannun's Home, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Dates, length of sessions: March 29, 1993 (104 minutes); March 30, 1993 (88); April 1, 1993 (85); April 2, 1993 (161).

Total number of recorded hours: 7.3

Persons present during interview: Hannun and Hathaway.

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 five-year Pew scholarships, from 1988 through 1992.

In preparing for this interview, Hathaway, in consultation with the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants, developed a topic outline to provide an overall interview framework. Hathaway then held a telephone preinterview conversation with Hannun to obtain extensive written background information (curriculum vitae; copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on a research and interviewing timetable. Hathaway further reviewed the documentation in Hannun's file at the Pew Scholars office in San Francisco, including his proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members. For general background on the recent history of the biological sciences, Hathaway consulted such works as J.D. Watson et al. *The Molecular Biology of the Gene*. 4th ed. 2 vols. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1987; Lubert Stryer. *Biochemistry*. 3d ed. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1988; *Journal of the History of Biology*; and H.F. Judson. *The Eighth Day of Creation: Makers of the Revolution in Biology*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Hannun's childhood and education in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon and continuing through his education at American University of Beirut and his postdoctoral fellowship and subsequent professorship at Duke University Medical Center. Major topics discussed include the Middle East; clinical medicine; Hannun's research on protein kinase C, diacylglycerol, sphingosine, and the mitogenic pathway; and the politics of basic science funding.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Steven J. Novak, editor, edited the interview. He 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.

Hannun reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections.

Novak also prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, interview history, and index.

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