

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

STEPHANIE LOUISE KWOLEK

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Raymond C. Ferguson

in

Sharpley, Delaware

on

4 May 1986

STEPHANIE KWOLEK

THE BECKMAN CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF CHEMISTRY

Oral History Program

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STEPHANIE LOUISE KWOLEK

1923 Born in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, on 31 July

Education

1946 B.S., chemistry, Carnegie-Mellon University
Some graduate courses in chemistry

Professional Experience

	E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Inc.
1946-1959	Chemist
1959-1967	Research Chemist
1967-1974	Senior Research Chemist
1974-1986	Research Associate

Honors

1959	Publication Award, Delaware Section, American Chemical Society
1976	Howard N. Potts Medal, Franklin Institute of Philadelphia
1978	Award for Contributions to "Kevlar" (DuPont trademark for aramid fiber), American Society for Metals
1980	Chemical Pioneer Award, American Institute of Chemists
1980	Award for Creative Invention, American Chemical Society
1981	Honorary Doctor of Science degree, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
1983	Alumni Association Merit Award, Carnegie-Mellon University
1985	Engineering/Technology Award, Society of Plastics Engineers
1985	Polymer Processing Hall of Fame, University of Akron
1988	Harold DeWitt Smith Memorial Award, American Society of Testing Materials
1990	Du Pont Honoree at the Bicentennial Celebration of the United States Patent and Copyright Laws

ABSTRACT

Stephanie Kwolek starts this interview by talking about her family background. Her father's early death meant that her mother had to work to support Kwolek and her brother, who became a chemical engineer. At Carnegie Institute of Technology, Kwolek shifted her interests from medicine to chemistry. Deciding to enter industry, she accepted a position with the Rayon Department of Du Pont at Buffalo. Here she started her career in polymer synthesis and worked with Izard, Wittbecker, and Morgan. When the laboratory moved to Wilmington, Kwolek was associated with the low-temperature polymerization program; she discusses the nylon rope trick, Du Pont promotion policy, and liquid crystalline polymers. The interview concludes with her reflections on colleagues and Du Pont consultants.

INTERVIEWER

Raymond C. Ferguson obtained his degrees in chemistry from Iowa State University (B.S., M.S.) and Harvard University (Ph.D.). He worked in research divisions of the Organic Chemicals, Elastomer Chemicals, and Central Research Departments of Du Pont, principally in molecular spectroscopy, organic structure analysis, and polymer characterization. Currently he is affiliated with CONDUX, Inc., a consulting association of ex-Du Pont professionals.

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