

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**GUSTAVO W. LEONE**

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of Interviews  
Conducted by

David J. Caruso

at

Ohio State University Medical Center  
Columbus, Ohio

on

23 and 24 October 2008

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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## **GUSTAVO LEONE**

1962 Born in Montevideo, Uruguay on 12 November

### Education

1988 B.Sc., Biochemistry, University of Calgary

1994 Ph.D., Molecular Virology, University of Calgary

### Professional Experience

1994-1998 Duke University Medical Center  
Postdoctorate, Genetics, Howard Hughes Medical Institute

1999-present The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center  
Assistant Professor

### Honors

1989-1994 Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Studentship  
1994-1997 Medical Research Council of Canada Fellowship  
1994-1997 Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Fellowship  
1997-1999 Medical Research Council of Canada Centennial Fellowship  
1999 The Robert M. and Barbara R. Bell Basic Science of Cancer Award  
1999-2001 The V Foundation Scholar Award  
2001-2005 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences  
2004-2009 Scholar, Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

## ABSTRACT

**Gustavo Leone** was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, and lived there until he was twelve—he was the second of three children. His parents owned a deli, in which Leone worked too. Not being able to get ahead, the family moved to Montréal, Québec, Canada seeking better opportunities; a few years later, Leone's father died. From there the family moved to Calgary, Alberta. Leone played soccer much of the time, though he was also interested in marbles and street hockey. He got into fights regularly; he eventually began taking karate lessons. His only outstanding memory of school is that he loved high school biology.

Leone entered the University of Calgary, where he did not do well his first year. He left school for a year and a half; he and his girlfriend bought a motorcycle and traveled through Canada, the United States, and Central America, eventually ending up in Uruguay. When they ran out of money they returned to Canada, where Leone began college anew. He worked hard and did well, intending to become a doctor. After his third year he spent the summer working in Patrick Lee's lab. He loved that work so much he knew he was made for research. He married his fellow-traveler girlfriend and remained in Lee's lab for his PhD, where he worked on reovirus and began work on cell cycles. He loved the work, sometimes even sleeping on a cot in the lab. Feeling that he had much to learn, he delayed finishing his PhD for a year, focusing his research on experiments with oligomerization, the results of which ended up conflicting with those of a Harvard University group. During these years he and his wife had two children.

Lee advised Leone to go to Duke University to work with Joseph Nevins. There he studied cell cycle with James DeGregori, who had lived in Uruguay for a year. The two hit it off and published an important paper before DeGregori left Duke. From Nevins Leone says he learned mentoring and lab management as well as a great deal of science.

Leone engaged in protracted negotiations for a faculty position with University of Calgary, but when Ohio State University made him an enthusiastic offer, he and his family packed up and moved to Columbus. Changing technology brought the opportunity to study interrelationships among the E2F family members, which is where Leone sought a cure for some cancers, notably breast cancer. Seeing cancer as a complex disease needing collaboration and communication among people with differing approaches and goals, Leone established Tumor Microenvironment. He is also one of the heads of the OSU Comprehensive Cancer Center. He continues to find the study of chemistry and genetics of cancer tissue important and fascinating.

Leone concludes his interview with discussions of his administrative responsibilities; his publication history and methods; the connections between art and science; and the importance to him of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award.

## INTERVIEWER

**David J. Caruso** earned a B.A. in the History of Science, Medicine, and Technology from the Johns Hopkins University in 2001 and a Ph.D. in Science and Technology Studies from Cornell University in 2008. His graduate work focused on the interaction of American military and medical personnel from the Spanish-American War through World War I and the institutional transformations that resulted in the development of American military medicine as

a unique form of knowledge and practice. David is currently the Program Manager for Oral History at the CHF. His current research interest focuses on the discipline formation of biomedical science in 20th-century America and the organizational structures that have contributed to such formation.

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