

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

HANNELE RUOHOLA-BAKER

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

on

20, 21 and 27 May 2002

From the Original Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles

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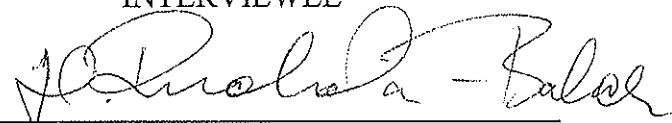
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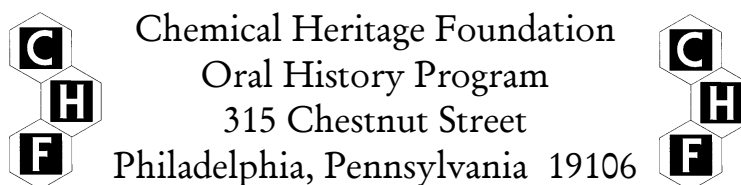
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HANNELE RUOHOLA-BAKER

1959 Born in Kullaa, Finland, on 10 December

Education

1984 B.A., University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
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Honors

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1992-1994 ACS Senior Postdoctoral Fellowship
1995-1997 Basil O'Connor Starter Scholar Research Award
1995-2000 American Heart Association Established Investigatorship Award
1996-2000 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant

Selected Publications

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ABSTRACT

Hannele Ruohola-Baker was born in Kullaa, Finland—a small farming village—the younger of two siblings. Her mother was a banker who always had an interest in learning, though did not have many opportunities for education earlier in her life. Ruohola-Baker spent much time with her maternal grandparents, since they lived nearby, and played with her older brother and his friends in the surrounding forests. She was always goal-oriented and did well in school; Finland had a very diverse educational system that provided equal education in all subjects (as much time was devoted to music as to science, for example). The local church was central to the community and informed much of Ruohola-Baker's early life.

She matriculated at the University of Helsinki, where Ruohola-Baker developed an interest in the study of molecules. A dynamic biochemistry professor, Ossi Renkonen, intrigued her and introduced her to the practice of scientific research; she joined his lab and began work on studying particular carbohydrates in proteins. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Helsinki and decided to pursue graduate school abroad, ultimately entering Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. While transitioning to life in the United States and learning about American culture, Ruohola-Baker began her graduate research in Terry Platt's lab, but then moved into Susan Ferro-Novick's lab, developing an assay for cellular transport. As it turns out, David Baker, her future husband, was working on the same problem in Randy Schekman's lab at the University of California, Berkeley and both she and Baker developed the assay successfully on the same day. From Yale she went on to a brief visiting Fellowship at the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden, and to a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco with Yuh Nung and Lily Jan. Ruohola-Baker moved away from protein secretion into the field of developmental biology, studying *Drosophila* and oogenesis. From there, she and her husband accepted principal investigator positions at the University of Washington, Seattle.

At the end of the interview she discusses her current research on cell polarity in *Drosophila* and possible applications of her research; the National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding process; writing articles; balancing work and family responsibilities; and a typical workday. Ruohola-Baker concludes with thoughts on the nature of competition and collaboration in science; the national science agenda; the privatization of scientific research; gender issues and questions of race in science; and the impact of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award on her work.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

William Van Benschoten, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., History, University of California, Riverside; M.A., History, University of California, Riverside; C. Phil., History, UCLA

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Ruohola-Baker's office, University of Washington.

Dates, length of sessions: May 20, 2002; May 21, 2002; and May 27, 2002

Total number of recorded hours: 5.0

Persons present during interview: Ruohola-Baker and Van Benschoten.

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' 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 four-year Pew scholarships since 1988.

To provide an overall framework for project interviews, the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Van Benschoten held a telephone preinterview conversation with Ruohola-Baker to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Ruohola-Baker's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including her proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

The interviewer 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.

Ruohola-Baker reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made a number of corrections.

Van Benschoten prepared the table of contents and interview history. TechniType Transcriptions compiled the guide to proper names.

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