MONICA L. VETTER

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by
William Van Benschoten

at
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah

on
5 and 8 November 2004

From the Original Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles
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David J. Caruso, Program Manager, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A., History of Science, Medicine, and Technology, Johns Hopkins University; PhD., Science and Technology Studies, Cornell University.
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Monica L. Vetter
(Typed Name)

Department of Neurobiology and Anatomy, University of Utah, 20 North, 190 East Room 517, Wintrobe, Salt Lake City, Utah 84132-3401
(Address)

801.581.4984  monica.vetter@neuro.utah.edu
(Phone Number)  (E-mail Address)

X  
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MONICA L. VETTER

1963 Born in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, on 8 April

Education

1986 Baccalaureate Degree, McGill University
1994 Ph.D., Neuroscience, University of California, San Francisco

Professional Experience

University of California, San Francisco
1994-1996 Postdoctoral Fellowship with Dr. Yuh Nung

University of Utah, School of Medicine
1996-2002 Assistant Professor, Department of Neurobiology and Anatomy
2002-present Associate Professor, Department of Neurobiology and Anatomy
2005-present Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences

Honors

1982-1986 R.E. Powell Entrance Scholarship, McGill University
1984 University of Ottawa Summer Research Scholarship
1985 NSERC Summer Research Award, University of Toronto
1985-1986 Miriam Hills Scholarship, McGill University
1986 University Scholar, McGill University
1986 Governor General’s Gold Medal, Faculty of Science, McGill University
1988-1993 Howard Hughes Predoctoral Fellowship
1997 Retina Research Foundation/Joseph M. and Eula C. Lawrence Fund ARVO Travel Award
1998-2002 Pew Scholars Award

Selected Publications


ABSTRACT

Monica L. Vetter grew up in Markham, Ontario, Canada, the eldest of three siblings. Vetter’s father worked for Honeywell and in the computer industry generally—and was gifted musically—and her mother was a nurse who, later in life, founded the Head Injury Association of Toronto, in part in response to a family tragedy. Vetter’s parents provided her with access to all the things typical of childhood: gymnastics, swimming, and piano lessons; she loved reading, spending much time in the library, playing soccer, and having fun with her brothers outdoors.

She entered McGill University, deciding to major in biosciences. Her interest in science led to several summers spent in various academic labs working on muscle contraction at the University of Ottawa, motor cortex and motor control in primates at the University of Toronto, and eye movements and the neural control of eye movements at McGill. Wanting to experience the academic world beyond the confines of the traditional Canadian/American school systems, Vetter spent a year abroad at the Free University in Berlin, Germany. During her time there, she applied to and was accepted at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), where she conducted research in the lab of J. Michael Bishop on molecular genetics and signaling pathways in neuronal cells. She remained at UCSF to undertake a postdoctoral position in Yuh Nung Jan’s laboratory focusing on ath5 transcription factor and the regulation of the initial events in vertebrate retinal neural development. From there she accepted a faculty appointment at the University of Utah, developing her research on retinal neurogenesis.

At the end of the interview, Vetter talks about the biomedical revolution and her decision to pursue academic research rather than work in industry; the issue of patents; her interest in the history of science; and the role of the scientist in scientific public policy and literacy. She concludes with thoughts about the impact of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award on her work and the process of conducting scientific research.
UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:


TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Vetter’s office at the University of Utah.

Dates of sessions: November 5 and 8, 2004.

Total number of recorded hours: 4.5.

Persons present during interview: Vetter 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’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 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 Vetter to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in Vetter’s file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including Vetter’s proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol Squires edited the interview. She 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.

Vetter reviewed the transcript. She verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Carol Squires prepared the table of contents and TechniType Transcripts compiled the guide to proper names.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growing Up and Going to College in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School and Postdoctoral Work at the University of California, San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends graduate school at University of California, San Francisco. College experiences at McGill University. Experiences at Free University of Berlin in Germany. Graduate research with J. Michael Bishop. Religion. Husband. Children. Graduate research in molecular genetics on signaling pathways in neuronal cells. Postdoctoral work in Yuh Nung Jan’s laboratory on ath5 transcription factor and regulation of the initial events in vertebrate retinal neural development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on Mentors and Becoming Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Practice of and Reflections on Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX

A
Academic Senate, 47, 48
achaete-scute, 34
Alberts, Bruce, 78
Ath5, 32, 33
Atlantic, 64

B
Bargmann, Cornelia I., 29
Barnes & Noble, 15
Berlin, Germany, 13, 15, 18, 23, 24, 28, 71
Bethesda, Maryland, 30
Bishop, J. Michael, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33, 35,
  36, 38, 39, 40, 56, 67, 68, 78
Borders Books and Music, 15
Boston, Massachusetts, 50
Brown University, 42
Brown, Nadean L., 46, 76

C
C. (Caenorhabditis) elegans, 29
Caddick, Sarah, 45
Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 1, 16
Cambridge, England, 83
Canada, 2, 4, 5, 14, 18, 21
Caribbean Sea, 64, 87
Catalyst for a Cure, 45
Cepko, Constance, 34
Christopher Reeve Spinal Cord Injury
  Consortium, 45
collaboration, 27, 46, 75, 76, 82
competition, 16, 50, 75
Consalez, Giacomo, 82
Cozumel, Mexico, 64

D
Developmental Dynamics, 61
Doniach, Tabitha, 32, 34
Drosophila, 31, 32, 34, 40, 68

E
Eckert, Cameron, 21
England, 16, 72
Europe, 29

F
Finney, Robert E., 27
Florida, 25
Free University of Berlin, 24, 72
Frizzled, 44

G
gender, 81, 83, 84
genome, 67, 79
German/Germany, 4, 6, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19,
  23, 24, 25, 71, 72
glaucoma, 45, 53
Glaucoma Research Foundation, 45
grants/funding, 32, 39, 40, 42, 43, 45, 46,
  47, 53, 54, 55, 57, 60, 61, 63, 65, 66, 73,
  74, 75, 76, 85, 86
Great Depression, 4

H
Hamburg, Germany, 4
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 2, 6, 7
Harper’s, 64
Harris, William A., 33, 34, 76, 83
Harvard University, 50
Head Injury Association of Toronto, 7
Hill Air Force Base, 82
history of science, 71, 72, 87
Honeywell, 6
Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 73

I
Ireland, 64
Italy, 24, 82
J
Jan, Lily, 2, 37, 40
Jan, Yuh Nung, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 51, 68, 70, 71
Julius, David, 29

K
Kanekar, Shami, 43
Kaplan, David R., 27, 30
Kelly, Regis B., 27, 30
Kirsch Foundation, 45
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
Korenbrot, Juan I., 29
Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany, 24
Kuhn, Thomas, 72

L
Lander, Eric S., 79
Linstedt, Adam D., 30
Lisberger, Stephen, 19

M
Maricq, Aleksander James (son), 17, 29, 35, 39, 53, 61, 63, 78
Maricq, Andres Villu (husband), 28, 35, 48, 50, 61, 81
Maricq, Ella Louise (daughter), 29, 35, 53, 56, 61
Markham Fair, 2
Markham, Ontario, Canada, 1, 7
Martin, Gail, 85
Math5, 46
McConnell, Susan K., 38
McGill University, 17, 18, 20, 21
Merzenich, Michael, 18, 19
Michener, James, 12
Milan, Italy, 82
Molecular Biology of the Gene, 25
Montreal, Québec, Canada, 17, 22, 28
Moore, Kathryn B., 82
Motorola, 8
Myriad Inc., 67

N
National Cancer Institute, 30
National Institutes of Health, 45, 46, 60, 73, 74, 75, 77, 86
National Science Foundation, 85
nerve growth factor, 30, 31
neurogenesis, 32, 34, 43, 44
neurons, 20, 30, 31, 34, 44
New York, 25
New York Review of Books, 24
New York Times, 78
News from the Smithsonian, 80
NGF. See nerve growth factor
NIH. See National Institutes of Health
Nobel Prize, 87
Nortel, 10
North Carolina, 25

O
oncogenes, 26, 27, 30
src, 27, 30
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 10, 18

P
Pacific Ocean, 24
Parada, Luis F., 30, 31
patent, 68, 69
Pentagon, 82
Pew Charitable Trusts, 77
Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences, 64, 77, 86
phospholipase C-gamma, 30, 31
polymerase chain reaction, 34
Pozzoli, Ombretta, 82
Princeton University, 42
publish/publication, 4, 32, 33, 39, 41, 59, 60, 84
Pugwash, 21, 77
Purkinje, Jan, 72

R
Red Army, 5
Reh, Tom, 34
Reichardt, Louis, 25
religion, 28, 29
United Church of Canada, 28
retina/retinal, 32, 33, 43, 44, 45
Rotary International, 18
Rous sarcoma virus, 27
Russell, Bertrand, 21
Russian, 5

S
Salk Institute for Biological Studies, 50
Salt Lake City, Utah, 2, 15, 82
San Francisco, California, 19, 24, 28, 50
Saskatchewan, Canada, 4
Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, 1
Schoenwolf, Gary, 62
Science and Society Institute, 77
Scientific American, 78
Seattle, Washington, 27
serendipity, 70
Shatz, Carla J., 38
Sox, 44
Stanford University, 38
study sections, 47, 53, 60, 61, 63
Switzerland, 47

T
Technical University of Berlin, 71
technology, 51, 52, 66, 72, 73
tenure, 48, 74, 85
Tessier-Lavigne, Marc, 21
Tomlin, Lily, 2
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1, 2, 15, 17, 18, 21
transcription, 30, 31, 34, 43, 44
Trk, 31
tyrosine kinase, 30, 31

U
UCSF. See University of California, San Francisco
United States of America, 19, 25, 75, 82
University of California, Berkeley, 38
University of California, San Francisco, 18, 19, 25, 29, 31, 37, 38, 39, 49, 50, 52, 69, 70, 85, 86
University of Cincinnati, 46
University of Toronto, 6, 15
University of Utah, 1, 29, 32, 33, 37, 40, 42, 49, 74, 83
University of Western Ontario, 17
Ur, Leon, 12
Utah, 28

V
Varmus, Harold E., 26, 27, 30, 77
Vetter, Anna Elizabeth Gruhn (paternal grandmother), 4
Vetter, Anthony Scott (brother), 10
Vetter, Friederich Johann (paternal grandfather), 4
Vetter, Michael Conrad (brother), 7, 10
Vetter, William (paternal uncle), 5
Vincent, Esther Ruth (mother), 2
Vincent, Kenneth William (maternal grandfather), 2
Vincent, Lillian Agnes Hertfelder (maternal grandmother), 2

W
Washington, D.C., 82
Wnt/FRIZZLED, 44

X
Xenopus, 32, 33, 46

Z
Zhang, Jianmin, 82