

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

THOMAS E. WILSON

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

David J. Caruso

at

University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

on

12 and 13 February 2008
(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)



Thomas E. Wilson

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Thomas E. Wilson

1965 Born in Parma, Ohio on 19 October

Education

1987 B.S., Biochemistry, University of Wisconsin
1994 M.D., Washington University School of Medicine
1994 Ph.D., Neural Sciences, Washington University School of Medicine

Professional Experience

Washington University School of Medicine
1994-1999 Residency in Laboratory Medicine
1991-1994 Post-doctoral Fellow, Laboratory of Michael Lieber
1998-1999 Chief Resident, Laboratory Medicine

University of Michigan
1999-2006 Assistant Professor, Department of Pathology
2006-present Associate Professor, Department of Pathology

Honors

1983-1984 Menasha Rotary Continuing Higher Education Scholarship
1983-1987 Medical Scholars Program, University of Wisconsin
1986 LR Ingersoll Prize in Physics, University of Wisconsin
1986 Knapp-Brittingham Honors Undergraduate Research Fellowship,
University of Wisconsin
1986 Phi Beta Kappa, University of Wisconsin (elected junior year)
1987 Letters and Science Honors Graduate, University of Wisconsin
1987-1994 Medical Scientist Training Program, Washington University School of
Medicine
1988 Lange Outstanding Medical Student Book Award, Washington University
School of Medicine
1988 Edmund V. Cowdry Prize in Histology, Washington University School of
Medicine
1989 McGraw Hill Outstanding Medical Student Book Award, Washington
University School of Medicine
1989-1993 Merck, Sharpe & Dohme Graduate Research Fellow

1993	Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Medical Scientist Fellow, Washington University School of Medicine
1994	Alpha Omega Alpha
1994	Missouri State Medical Association Honors Graduate
1996-1999	Howard Hughes Medical Institute Physician Post-doctoral Fellow
1999	Biological Sciences Scholars Program, University of Michigan
2000-2004	Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

ABSTRACT

Thomas E. Wilson's oral history begins with a discussion of his childhood in Neenah, Wisconsin where his father was a chemical engineer with Kimberley-Clark. While his father often brought work and work-related discussions home, his mother, a teacher, also encouraged the academic and inquisitive environment of the household. Nature activities, building projects, and music heavily influenced Wilson's childhood. Although there was brief interest in attending college to pursue a study of music, Wilson matriculated at the University of Wisconsin from which a number of his family members had graduated. During his undergraduate studies Wilson was involved in the Medical Scholars Program for pre-medical studies, pursued biology research with Charles B. Kaspar, and built musical instruments. The developing field of molecular biology and the excitement of research lessened Wilson's interest in pursuing the medical degree, however, Wilson decided upon a combined MD/PhD program at Washington University in St. Louis where he could continue his longstanding interest in medicine but pursue a laboratory research program as well. While Wilson acknowledges the flaws in combined programs, he still believes in the ideological and practical benefits of integrating the clinical and laboratory aspects of the two degrees. Joining Jeffrey D. Milbrant's laboratory for his Ph.D. research, Wilson undertook a DNA binding project that allowed him to collaborate with yeast geneticist Mark Johnston. Wilson and his wife, who was also in the MD/PhD program at Washington University in St. Louis, started their family while still in graduate school, which changed the amount of time Wilson spent in the lab, but taught him an increased level of efficiency. Wilson experienced difficulty transitioning from the Ph.D. program back to the clinical rotations of medical school, leading him to focus less on clinical work and more on research. He set his sights on pathology which enabled him to work with tissue in a medical context but not directly with patients. After earning his M.D. and Ph.D. degrees, Wilson began his residency and post-doctoral research on DNA repair mechanisms with Michael R. Lieber. After Lieber moved to the University of Southern California, Wilson stayed at Washington University and used space in Milbrandt's lab in order to finish his work. He secured a position at the University of Michigan within the pathology department which would allow him ample laboratory opportunities while maintaining ties to the clinical world. Shortly after beginning as a principal investigator, Wilson earned the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award. Throughout the oral history interview Wilson discussed funding, balancing clinical and laboratory duties and work and family, and the public understanding of science.

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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