CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

PENELOPE A. FENNER-CRISP

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Sarah L. Hunter-Lascoskie and Jody A. Roberts

at

Fenner-Crisp's Home
North Garden, Virginia

on

3 and 4 April 2012

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Center for Oral History
FINAL RELEASE FORM

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PENELOPE FENNER-CRISP

(Date) _March 28, 2014_____

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Chemical Heritage Foundation
Center for Oral History
315 Chestnut Street
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PENELOPE A. FENNER-CRISP

1939	Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 18 April

Education

1962	BS, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Zoology
1964	MA, University of Texas Medical Branch, Pharmacology
1968	PhD, University of Texas Medical Branch, Pharmacology

Professional Experience

	Marquette University School of Medicine, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1959-1961	Research Technician, Department of Pharmacology
1959, 1961-1962	Research Technician and Assistant, Department of Pathology
	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1961-1962	Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Zoology
	University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas
1962-1966	Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Pharmacology
	University of Birmingham Medical School, Birmingham, U.K.
1974-1975	Visiting Scientist, Department of Physiology
	Georgetown University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, Washington
1971-1976	Adjunct Instructor, Postdoctoral Fellow, Research Associate, Department of Anatomy
1976-1978	Research Associate, Department of Pharmacology
	United States Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC
1978-1987	Senior Toxicologist, Health Effects Branch, Office of Drinking Water
1987	Special Assistant to the Director, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances
1987	Acting Director, Health and Environmental Review Division, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances
1987-1989	Director, Health and Environmental Review Division, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances
1989-1994	Director, Health Effects Division, Office of Pesticide Programs
1994-1995	Acting Deputy Director, Office of Pesticide Programs
1995-1997	Deputy Director, Office of Pesticide Programs
1997-1998	Special Assistant to the Assistant Administrator, Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances

1998-2000	Senior Science Advisor to the Director, Office of Pesticide Programs
	International Life Sciences Institute, Washington, DC
2000-2004	Executive Director, Risk Science Institute
2004-present	Independent Consultant

Honors

1964	Johanna Blumel Award to female medical or graduate student with highest grade point average (GPA)
1982	USEPA Gold Medal for Exceptional Service (In recognition of the creative development and exceptional implementation of health advisories which were extremely useful to States and communities affected by contamination of drinking water supplies in the United States)
1986	USEPA Bronze Medal for Commendable Service (For outstanding service in the organization and review of Risk Reference Doses (Acceptable Daily Intakes) and the science from which they are derived)
1988	USEPA Bronze Medal for Commendable Service (For outstanding contributions in the development of the first 25 Toxicological Profiles in accordance with Section 110 of the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986)
1988	USEPA Bronze Medal for Commendable Service (For exceptional achievement in the development and implementation of the Office of Drinking Water's Performance Improvement Project)
1989	USEPA Bronze Medal for Commendable Service (For exceptional achievement in the timely development of Health Advisories for the National Pesticide Survey)
1994	USDA Certificate of Appreciation (In recognition of significant contributions in developing the Codex Strategic Planning document)
1996	Society for Risk Analysis Risk Practitioner award
1999	USEPA Bronze Medal for Commendable Service (Recognition for scientific expertise and national leadership shown in developing the EPA policy for use of probabilistic analysis in risk assessment).
2000	USEPA Fitzhugh Green Award (the Agency's highest award for contributions on behalf of EPA to its international activities).
2003	Toxicology Forum Fellow

ABSTRACT

Penelope Fenner-Crisp grew up in the suburbs of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one of two children. Her father changed jobs frequently; her mother was a housewife until Fenner-Crisp was nearly through high school. The family all read a great deal, and Fenner-Crisp loved science from third grade on. At the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Fenner-Crisp majored in zoology and minored in chemistry. While in college Fenner-Crisp worked at Marquette University's Medical School, working first on mosquitos and malaria in Harry Beckman's lab. She later switched to work on blood pressure in James Hilton's lab and moved to Galveston, Texas, as a graduate student in his lab. In Galveston she married, had her first child, and finished her dissertation research. When her husband finished his PhD and accepted a position at Georgetown Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, the family moved to Northern Virginia. Four years after their second child was born, Fenner-Crisp began (and finished) a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in her husband's laboratory. When the family went to Birmingham, England, for her husband's sabbatical, Fenner-Crisp worked on cardiac function in John Coote's lab. Back at Georgetown University she worked in Frank Standaert's lab for eighteen months and spent a few months working on a toxicology report for the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). All this experience made her realize that she did not want to teach or to do research in a lab.

Finding another career option at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Fenner-Crisp began by writing health advirsories for neurotoxic pesticides in drinking water. She helped organize Women in Science and Engineering (WISE). Tired of the Office of Drinking Water and wanting to help make policy, she became deputy director and then director of the Health and Environmental Review Division of the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxic Substances. From there Fenner-Crisp went to the Office of Pesticide Programs, where she had the most fun.

Next Fenner-Crisp began work on the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA), dealing again with neurotoxins as well as other classes of pesticides. She found that she liked working in the data-rich environment of pesticide regulation. An NAS study on pesticides in the diets of infants and children in the twenty most commonly consumed foods concluded that no carcinogens should be approved. Congress mandated an almost-immediate establishment of EDSTAC (Endocrine Disruptor Screening and Testing Advisory Committee), so the EPA had to find scientists and design tests. Fenner-Crisp set up the office in which the Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program would reside, but refused to run it, instead going back to Pesticides for her last few years at the EPA; there she finished the FQPA-mandated science policy on the child-specific additional 10x safety factor, and, feeling a sense of "completion" and believing that the "fun stuff" was done, she retired.

After leaving the EPA Fenner-Crisp was director of the Risk Science Institute (RSI) at the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) for four years, working on many projects designed to improve general principles and practices of risk assessment.

Fenner-Crisp is skeptical about absolute claims on either side of a scientific argument; she talks about voluntary versus involuntary risk and personal responsibility. She explains animal welfare issues and their value in translating study results for their prediction of the impact on human health of exposure to chemicals. She talks about personalities, rivalries, and competition, within and between shifting departments, populations, and administrations. She

promotes government career choices for chemists and scientists in other disciplines. She discusses publishing, women in science, and professional societies. Regarding pesticides, she advises the public to "be aware but don't be afraid." Officially retired, she nevertheless continues to participate in the activities of several science-based non-profit organizations such as GreenBlue and Piedmont Master Gardeners.

INTERVIEWERS

Sarah L. Hunter-Lascoskie earned a BA in history at the University of Pennsylvania and an MA in public history at Temple University. Her research has focused on the ways in which historical narratives are created, shaped, and presented to diverse groups. Before Sarah joined CHF, she was the Peregrine Arts Samuel S. Fels research intern and Hidden City project coordinator. Sarah worked both in the Center for Oral History and the Institute for Research at CHF and led projects that connected oral history and public history, producing a number of online exhibits that used oral histories, archival collections, and other materials. She also contributed to CHF's *Periodic Tabloid* and *Distillations*.

Jody A. Roberts is the Director of the Institute for Research at the Chemical Heritage Foundation. He received his PhD and MS in Science and Technology Studies from Virginia Tech and holds a BS in Chemistry from Saint Vincent College. His research focuses on the intersections of regulation, innovation, environmental issues, and emerging technologies within the chemical sciences.

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