

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

TOM W. MUIR

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Rockefeller University
New York, New York

on

15 and 16 August 2002

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Interviewee agrees to participate in a series of University-conducted tape-recorded interviews, commencing on or about August 15, 2002, and tentatively entitled "Interview with Tom W. Muir. This Agreement relates to any and all materials originating from the interviews, namely the tape recordings of the interviews and a written manuscript prepared from the tapes, hereinafter collectively called "the Work."

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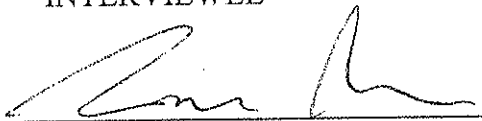
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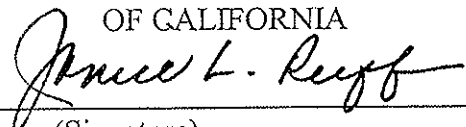
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INTERVIEWEE

THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY
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(Signature)


(Signature)

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(Typed Name)

Janice L. Reiff
(Typed Name)

Laboratory of Synthetic Protein Chemistry
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1230 York Avenue

New York, NY 10021-6399

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Date 5 Nov 2002

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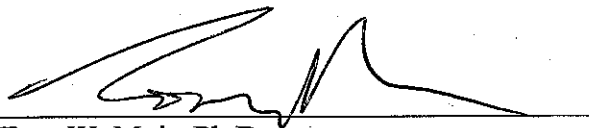
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TOM W. MUIR

1967 Born in Stranraer, Scotland, on 21 June

Education

1989 B.Sc. (Hons) 1st Class, Chemistry, University of Edinburgh
1993 Ph.D., Organic Chemistry, University of Edinburgh

Professional Experience

Scripps Research Institute, Bio-Organic Chemistry
1993 Postdoctorate
1995 Senior Research Associate

Rockefeller University
1996 Assistant Professor, Head of Laboratory, Bio-Organic Chemistry
2000 Associate Professor, Head of Laboratory, Bio-Organic Chemistry
2002 Professor, Head of Laboratory, Bio-Organic Chemistry

Honors

Faculty of Science undergraduate scholarship (University of Edinburgh)
Mackay-Smith undergraduate prize (University of Edinburgh)
Stephenson undergraduate prize (University of Edinburgh)
Faculty of Science postgraduate scholarship (University of Edinburgh)
Williamson postgraduate prize (University of Edinburgh)
Gordon postgraduate fellowship (University of Edinburgh)
Amgen postdoctoral fellowship (Scripps Research Institute)
1997-2001 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant
Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow (Rockefeller University)
Burroughs-Wellcome Fund New Investigator Award (Rockefeller University)
Irma T. Hirsch/Monique Weill-Caulier Trust Research Fellow (Rockefeller University)
2002 Leonidas Zervas Award from The European Peptide Society (Rockefeller University)

ABSTRACT

Thomas W. Muir grew up in Stranraer, Scotland—a major port city about two-hundred miles south of Glasgow—the oldest of three brothers. His father was a telephone engineer technician and his mother a housewife, both of whom had an interest and aptitude for music; and though they both had the intelligence for a college education, neither had enough money to attend when younger. Muir was raised in a working-class home, attending public school like all of his friends, with an intense interest in soccer and golf. His paternal grandfather fueled Muir's innate interest in mathematics; and although teachers were aware of his affinity for mathematics, and, later, chemistry, large, public-school classes offered little opportunity for his teachers to foster his interests. Muir excelled at his college entrance exams and received an unconditional acceptance to all the schools to which he applied (he chose to remain in high school one additional year instead of starting college early).

He decided to study chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, developing friendships with classmates Steven Thom and James H. Naismith. Muir stayed at the University of Edinburgh to pursue PhD research with Robert Ramage on the physical properties of synthesized peptides and then undertook a postdoctoral position with Stephen B.H. Kent at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California. After being influenced by Mark J. Ginsberg's work on cellular interactions, Muir switched his research focus from FTV protease to chemical ligation and the integrin system, collaborating with Michael J. Williams, and eventually becoming a senior research associate. He then accepted a faculty position at Rockefeller University where his research focused on chemical biology and the use of chimeras of synthetic peptides and recombinant proteins for *in vitro* biochemical pathway studies.

Throughout his oral history interview, Muir discusses his teaching and administrative duties, the ways in which he manages his science, publishing, patents, funding, and collaborations. He also reflects on his creative process for pursuing scientific questions and the role that the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences played in his early career development.

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: Muir's office, Rockefeller University.

Dates, length of sessions: August 15, 2002 (165 minutes) and August 16, 2002 (72.5 minutes).

Total number of recorded hours: 3.92

Persons present during interview: Muir 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 Muir 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 Muir's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including his proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol Squires, freelance editor, 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.

Muir reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Squires prepared the table of contents. Muir provided the biographical summary. Van

Benschoten prepared the interview history. Deborah Lattimore, transcriber, compiled the index.

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