

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**GÖKHAN S. HOTAMISLIGIL**

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Harvard School of Public Health  
Boston, Massachusetts

on

12 and 13 December 2002

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



Gökhan S. Hotamisligil

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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**REFORMATTING:**

Kim Phan, Program Intern, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A. expected 2011, Anthropology, Cornell University.

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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Interviewee agrees to participate in a series of University-conducted tape-recorded interviews, commencing on or about December 11, 2002, and tentatively entitled "Interview with Gokhan S. Hotamisliligil." 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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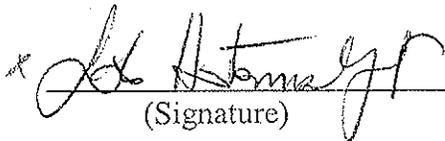
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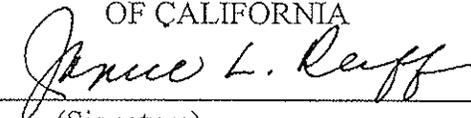
Gokhan S. Hotamisligil  
Department of Nutrition  
Harvard University  
665 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115

University and Interviewee have executed this Agreement on the date first written above.

INTERVIEWEE

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(Signature)

  
(Signature)

Gokhan Hotamisligil  
(Typed Name)

Janice L. Reiff  
(Typed Name)

Department of Nutrition  
(Address)

Interim Director, Oral History Program  
(Title)

Harvard University

\_\_\_\_\_

Boston, MA 02115

\_\_\_\_\_

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Date 7 January 2003

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## GÖKHAN S. HOTAMISLIGIL

1962 Born in Pazar, Turkey, on 24 June

### Education

1986 M.D., Medicine, Ankara University Medical School, Ankara, Turkey  
1994 Ph.D., Biological Chemistry and Molecular Pharmacology, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts

### Professional Experience

Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts  
1988-1989 Research Fellow, Neuro-genetics  
1994-1995 Postdoctoral Fellow, Cell Biology

Harvard School of Public Health, Division of Biological Sciences  
1995 Assistant Professor, Department of Nutrition  
1999 Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition  
2003 Professor, Department of Nutrition  
2003 Professor, Department of Genetics and Complex Diseases  
2003 Chair, Department of Genetics and Complex Diseases

### Honors

1989 Harvard University, Division of Medical Sciences Predoctoral Fellowship  
1991 Lucille P. Markey Predoctoral Fellowship in Developmental Biology  
1994 American Diabetes Association Postdoctoral Fellowship  
1996-1999 Career Development Award, American Diabetes Association  
1997-2001 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant  
2003-2006 Sandler Family Foundation Sr. Investigator Award, Program for Asthma Research  
2003 James Stevens Simmons Endowed Professorship in Genetics & Metabolism  
2004 Elected Member, TUBA, Turkish National Academy of Sciences and Recipient, TUBITAK Science Award

### Selected Publications

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## ABSTRACT

**Gökhan S. Hotamisligil** was born in the small town of Pazar on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, the youngest of three siblings. He moved several times when young, attending at least three separate elementary schools, though he spent most of his youth in the city of Ankara. His father was a physician who served underdeveloped areas of Turkey (hence the early travel); his mother was trained as a teacher but spent her time raising Hotamisligil, his brother, and his sister. Hotamisligil learned much from his family intellectually, socially, and culturally, and from the private boarding school he attended for middle and high schools in Ankara. He was a varsity athlete in high school (track and field, volleyball, and table tennis) and was interested in his studies, though his science classes did not provide him with much experience in experimentation. He wanted to be a physician from an early age. He took the entrance exam for and attended Ankara University to obtain his medical degree during a time of political upheaval in Turkey (the 1980 military coup).

Hotamisligil decided to specialize in pediatrics and was fortunate to have his residency at Ankara University instead of serving his compulsory government service in the remote town of Bingöl. While at Ankara, he became interested in genetics while preparing a seminar on the molecular basis of thalassemia. His wife's scholarship to the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center for Mental Retardation in Massachusetts gave him the opportunity to apply for a position in Xandra O. Breakefield's laboratory at Harvard Medical School. Hotamisligil's work on monoamine oxidases in Breakefield's lab led him to apply for graduate study at Harvard; he undertook his graduate research on tumor necrosis factor, obesity, insulin resistance, and diabetes in Bruce M. Spiegelman's laboratory. He remained there for a postdoctoral fellowship until accepting an offer for a position at the Harvard School of Public Health. After setting up his lab, he began his work on the molecular mechanisms of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and began to think about studying the connections between the immune and metabolic systems, the inflammatory response, and disease.

The interview ends with reflections on role of serendipity in his work; the process of writing grants and journal articles; and balancing family and career. Hotamisligil concludes the oral history with thoughts about the direction of the national scientific agenda; the role of the scientist in shaping public policy; the industrialization of science; and the role of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences for his previous and current 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:** Hotamisligil's office, Harvard School of Public Health.

**Dates, length of sessions:** December 12, 2002 and December 13, 2002.

**Total number of recorded hours:** 5.0

**Persons present during interview:** Hotamisligil 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 Hotamisligil to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in Hotamisligil's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including Hotamisligil'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.

Hotamisligil's reviewed the transcript. He 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.

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