

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

CHRISTOPHER RONGO

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of Interviews
Conducted by

Hilary Domush and David J. Caruso

at

Waksman Institute for Microbiology at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Piscataway, New Jersey

on

19 and 20 May 2008

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)



Chris Rongo

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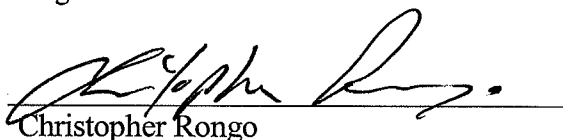
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CHRISTOPHER RONGO

1968 Born in Las Vegas, Nevada on 2 January

Education

1990 B.A., Molecular Biology, University of California, San Diego
1996 Ph.D., Biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Professional Experience

1996-1997 Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School
Post-Doctorate, Genetics under Joshua M. Kaplan

1997-2000 University of California, Berkeley
Post-Doctorate, Molecular and Cell Biology under
Joshua M. Kaplan

2000-2006 Waksman Institute and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Assistant Professor, Genetics
2006-present Associate Professor, Genetics

Honors

1989-1990 Alumni Association Scholarship, University of California, San Diego
1990 John Muir College Most Outstanding Graduate, University of California,
San Diego

1990 Phi Beta Kappa
1990 National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship

1997-2000 The Jane Coffin Childs Memorial Fund for Medical Research Post-
Doctoral Fellowship

2000-2001 Johnson & Johnson Discovery Award
2001-2005 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences
2002-2003 Johnson & Johnson Discovery Award

ABSTRACT

Christopher Rongo was born in Las Vegas, Nevada as an only child. Although science always interested him, he did not always have the determination to be a scientist. His undergraduate work at the University of California, San Diego fed his love of science, but a difficult research project in Ruth Lehmann's lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) nearly ended his scientific career. Refocusing his efforts and determination he was finally able to succeed in Lehmann's lab, and graduate just before she left MIT. He faced similar obstacles in Josh Kaplan's lab, first at Massachusetts General Hospital and then at the University of California, Berkeley. Despite setbacks as a graduate student and a postdoc, Rongo's career flourished as a professor. His early challenges prepared him to face the challenges set before a new PI, and ensured his continued success in neuroscience. The vast majority of his interview is focused on his work with Rutgers, what it is like being a PI, and the challenges faced by PIs attempting to juggle social lives, funding applications, and their own desire to be at the bench. In a time of pressure to publish and strong competition for funding, Rongo insists on moving forward. His increased interest in medical relevance in his work fuels his ambition. He looks towards what science has to offer in the future and is excited by the prospects that lie ahead, while openly facing the challenges presented to him. In addition, he discusses his receipt of the Pew Biomedical Scholars Award and what that has meant to his career.

INTERVIEWERS

Hilary Domush earned a B.S. in chemistry from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine in 2003. Since then she has completed a M.S. in chemistry and a M.A. in history of science both from the University of Wisconsin. Her graduate work in the history of science focused on early nineteenth-century chemistry in the city of Edinburgh, while her work in the chemistry was in a total synthesis laboratory. Hilary is currently Program Associate for Oral History at CHF, where she combines these two divergent academic paths. Her current work focuses on the Pew Biomedical Scholars and Women in

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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