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,
1086	Oniversity of Wisconsin Phi Beta Kanna University of Wisconsin (elected junior year)
1980	Letters and Science Honors Graduate University of Wisconsin
1987-1994	Medical Scientist Training Program Washington University School of
1907 1991	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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