SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE

ALISON TAUNTON-RIGBY

Life Sciences Foundation

Transcript of a Research Interview
Conducted by

Mark Jones

in

Boston, Massachusetts

on

22 January 2013

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

SCIENCE HISTORY INSTITUTE
Center for Oral History
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INTERVIEWEE

Alison Taunton-Rigby was born and educated in Great Britain. Her father was a scientist for the British government, and her mother was a physiotherapist. She attended the University of Bristol for her undergraduate and graduate degrees, studying chemistry, math, and physics. She came to the United States in October 1968 when she was offered a postdoc position at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, but she began working for Collaborative Research in Waltham, Massachusetts in February 1969. There, she worked on a number of projects, such as one with MIT to synthesize the first ribosomal RNA gene, years before recombinant DNA was developed. Throughout the seventies and eighties, biotechnology companies were beginning to expand, and in 1981, Collaborative Research was the second biotechnology company to go public. Taunton-Rigby had risen to the position of vice president of research & development, the only woman in a senior role at the company. She eventually left Collaborative Research for Biogen, where she was the vice president of business development. Her job entailed finding new technology or potential products coming out of academia and raise money for R&D limited partnerships. The job required Taunton-Rigby to travel extensively, so she left and joined Damon Biotech, where she was the general manager of their subsidiary company Vivotech, which was developing pancreatic islet cells for diabetics. The work never went fully commercial, and Taunton-Rigby moved on to Arthur D. Little Inc., a research and consulting organization, where she helped pharmaceutical companies restructure their R&D to enhance molecular and cellular biology.

Still facing frequent travel demands, Taunton-Rigby joined Genzyme in 1987 after she was approached by Henri Termeer, the company's CEO. There, she served as the senior vice president of biotherapeutics. With Genzyme, Taunton-Rigby oversaw the development of highly successful products such as Ceredase. She eventually left Genzyme to become the CEO of Mitotix, which was developing a cancer drug but was facing financial difficulties. She was later approached by Cambridge Biotech, which was in bankruptcy. She was brought in as its CEO and director with the mission of turning the company around. The company had to go to bankruptcy auction for their diagnostics business after which Taunton-Rigby moved the company and renamed it Aquila Biotherapeutics. When Aquila was merged with Antigenics in 2000, Taunton-Rigby left the company. She moved onto Catharsis Medical Technology, which created barcodes that nurses and doctors could use to cross reference a database and ensure a patient was receiving drugs that were compatible with one another, though found that hospitals were weary of working with a small company due to liability issues. Taunton-Rigby then helped to found RiboNovix with Phil Cunningham, which developed technology to understand the mutations of ribosomal RNA. The product never panned out due to rising costs and returned to development at Wayne State University. Taunton-Rigby sits on the board of five companies—three for healthcare and two for financial services, including Abt Associates, Boston Children's Hospital, Columbia Funds, and ICI Mutual Insurance. She also serves on a number of advisory boards.

INTERVIEWER

Mark Jones holds a PhD in history, philosophy, and social studies of science from the University of California, San Diego. He is the former director of research at the Life Sciences Foundation and executive editor of *LSF Magazine*. He has served in numerous academic posts, and is completing the definitive account of the origins of the biotechnology industry, entitled *Translating Life*, for Harvard University Press.

ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

Staff of the Life Sciences Foundation conducted this interview, which became a part of our collections upon the merger of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the Life Sciences Foundation into the Science History Institute in 2018. The Center for Oral History at the Science History Institute edited and formatted this transcript to match our style guide, but as noted, Science History Institute staff members did not conduct the interview.

The Center for Oral History, Science History Institute, is committed both to preserving the recording of each oral history interview in our collection and to enhancing research use of the interviews by preparing carefully edited transcripts of those recordings. The preparation of interview transcripts begins with the creation of a verbatim typescript of the recording and proceeds through review and editing by staff of the Center; interviewees also review the typescript and can request additions, deletions, or that sections be sealed for specified periods of time. The Center keeps track of all changes that staff, interviewers, and interviewees make to the original typescript. Please contact us if you would like additional information about these materials. We have established guidelines to help us maintain fidelity to the language and meaning of each recorded interview while making minor editorial adjustments for clarity and readability. Wherever possible, we supply the full names of people, organizations, or geographical locations mentioned during the interview. We add footnotes to the transcript to provide full citations for any publications that are discussed, to point to extant oral history interviews, and to clear up misstatements or provide context for ambiguous references in the transcript. We use brackets to indicate the addition of material that was not in the audio, and bracketed ellipses to indicate the deletion of recorded material. The transcript also includes time stamps at one-minute intervals. We omit without noting most instances of verbal crutches and all instances of nonlexical utterances. We also make small grammatical corrections where necessary to communicate interview participants' meaning. Finally, staff of the Center create the abstract, chronology, and table of contents. With the availability of online full-text searching of our transcripts, the Center for Oral History opted to discontinue the practice of preparing a back-of-the-book index for each oral history transcript in 2020.

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