

Interview of David L. Stone, former graduate student of Dr. Rosemarie Ostwald.



Childhood Prof. Ostwald(Bernfeld)-1926

- 1. How did Prof. Ostwald enter the field of science and why did she choose Cal? While entering Cal through the Chemistry Department, how did Prof. Ostwald enter the Department of Nutritional Sciences for most of her research?**

I can't provide any information on this question.

- 2. Did Prof. Ostwald talk about any apparent differences between the environment of the two departments? While the Department of Nutritional Sciences had a much more women faculties and much less in the Chemistry department, how was being a female scientist different in the two departments?**

I never heard her talk about this and I don't recall knowing that she had a chemistry background.

- 3. I learned that Prof. Ostwald had great reviews for teaching, how was Prof. Ostwald teaching style like?**

It has been ~40 years since I took her nutrition class, but I do recall she took teaching seriously, and covered topics in detail. The pace of her lectures was about right and she also wrote much of what she said on the blackboard. I particularly remember this because her handwriting, while quite consistent, was not very legible and I used to struggle to read what she had written. She tended to not close the loops in letters which had them, esp. lower-case 'a's.

- 4. How was balancing research and life been like for Prof. Ostwald being a female professor?**

By the time I met Dr. Ostwald she was well into middle age and her children had already left home and she had lost her husband to, I think, heart disease. But I surmise that there had been a good balance in prior years, as she was worldly, had traveled extensively and displayed in her home artefacts from places she had visited such as Papua, New Guinea. Her family also owned a piece of land in the Sierra Nevada which was left undeveloped but for, if I recall correctly, a wooden platform and her family and friends would bring tents and spend time there in the summers. I think she enjoyed a wide-ranging and satisfying life. My impression was that she was still quite physically active and had been, earlier in her life, a mountain climber. She was also a smoker and she enjoyed the stimulation of animated conversation and was conversant in many topics. She used to invite all her grad students to potluck dinners at her home from time to time. At UCB in her role as a researcher and teacher, she was all business: brusque, efficient, and even blunt in her speech at times; not a "touchy-feely" person at all. But in social situations (hosting the dinner parties, for example), she was charming, entertaining, and told stories about her travels.

Dr. Ostwald was also a very tough lady; a fighter. She had artery disease and suffered a moderate stroke while being operated upon to clear plaque from her carotid arteries. The stroke, despite its effects on her body and mind, did not deter her from coming back to the lab after a period of convalescence and attempting to resume where she had left off. She also suffered from cancer, the

details of which I no longer recall. Her death, if I remember correctly, was related to one or both of these medical conditions.

5. Has Prof.Ostwald ever mentioned any situations where she felt discriminated against as a woman professor?

Not that I was aware of, but that subject was not the sort of thing she would talk about to me. And of course various other members of the tenured faculty in the Nutrition Dept were women, so there was nothing unusual about Dr. Ostwald in that regard.

6. Being the Chair of the Berkeley Academic Senate Committee on the Status of Women and Ethnic Minorities, how had Prof.Ostwald supported women students on campus?

I can't provide any information about her performance in that position, but she did have a mix of male and female grad students and post-docs in her lab and co-authors on her publications. I doubt she went out of her way to favor women in her lab; she was interested in results rather than the sex of the people doing the work.

7. In your opinion, do you feel that Prof.Ostwald was underrecognized for her scientific work and if so, does being a woman be one of the reasons?

I didn't have a sense of how her research was judged by others in her field (lipids), but when I was associated with her lab she was studying cholesterol metabolism in Guinea pigs. These animals are particularly sensitive to cholesterol ingestion as it is not a part of their natural herbivorous diet. Part of her work while I was there involved looking into an odd effect that dietary cholesterol had on their red blood cells: the cell membranes became altered and developed spicules ('spiculated red cells'). That effect of dietary cholesterol doesn't occur in humans, and although human red cells can become spiculated in some circumstances, I don't know how human-relevant the Guinea-pig effect was considered to be. She and colleagues and grad students published numerous papers on various aspects of cholesterol and fatty-acid metabolism in Guinea pigs in reputable peer-reviewed international journals, so I suspect the fact she was a woman wasn't much of an issue, if at all. Taking a quick look at a sample of her published papers in PubMed shows citations of each one in 1 to ~15 other papers, so her work has been reasonably well-recognized in her field over the years.