CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

# JENNIE R. PATRICK

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Jeannette E. Brown

at

Atlanta, Georgia

on

30 March 2006

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

**JENNIE R. PATRICK**

1949 Born in Gadsden, Alabama on 1 January

## Education

1973 B.S., University of California, Berkeley, Chemical Engineering
1979 Sc.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Chemical Engineering

## Professional Experience

General Electric, Schenectady, New York
1979-1983 Research Engineer, Research and Development

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York
1982-1985 Adjunct Professor, Chemical Engineering

Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia
1983-1987 Adjunct Professor, Chemical Engineering

Phillip Morris, Richmond, Virginia
1983-1985 Project Manager, Research Center

Rohm & Haas, Bristol, Pennsylvania
1985-1990 Manager of Fundamental Chemical Engineering Research

Southern Company Services, Birmingham, Alabama
1990-1993 Assistant Executive Vice President

Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama
1993-1997 3M Eminent Scholar and Professor of Chemical Engineering

1997-2000 Raytheon Engineers and Constructors, Birmingham, Alabama

Environmental Wellness Institute, Atlanta, Georgia
2000-present Founder

## Honors

1979 First African-American woman in U.S. to earn a doctorate in Traditional

| | |
|---|---|
| | Chemical Engineering |
| 1980 | National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers Outstanding Women in Science and Engineering Award |
| 1983 | Served as Principle in Ciba-Geigy Exceptional Black Scientists Poster Program |
| 1984 | Honorary Doctor of Science from Tuskegee University |
| 1987 | Presidential Citation from the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education |
| 1989 | The World Who's Who of Women |
| 1990 | Dictionary for International Biography |
| 1994-1995 | Teacher of the Year, Chemical Engineering, Tuskegee University |
| 1996 | Who's Who among America's Teachers/Who's Who in the World/Who's Who of American Women |
| 2000 | Williams W. Grimes Award, American Institute of Chemical Engineers |

## ABSTRACT

**Jennie R. Patrick** grew up in Gadsden, a small, typically Southern, town in Alabama, the fourth of five children. Her parents were laborers whose formal education stopped in junior high school. As a child, she had no real experience of science, except that she was a curious child who always wanted to know how and why things worked. By junior high school she had decided she wanted to be a chemist. Her high school years involved forcible integration, and she was one of only eleven black students, of whom half left the white school before graduation. Jennie, however, was determined to succeed and to get the best education she could.

Patrick's mother vetoed her scholarship to University of California, Berkeley, her dream school, so Patrick entered Tuskegee Institute. She later transferred to Berkeley, where, as the only black and only American woman in chemical engineering, she continued to suffer racism. She excelled anyway and decided to go to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for her ScD. There she found more black students and professors, including John Turner, who was a dean of students, and less hostility. She also found a tough and challenging atmosphere that she loved. Her advisor was Robert C. Reid, and her thesis topic dealt with nucleation phenomena.

Patrick's first job was as research engineer at General Electric Research Center. Next, she became project manager at Philip Morris, working on supercritical extraction. Then she spent five years as research manager at Rohm and Haas Chemical Company in Philadelphia. She moved back south to Birmingham, Alabama, as Assistant Executive Vice President at Southern Company Services, working on increasing the efficiency of technology. She made this career change in part to enable her to care for her aging parents. She then was 3M Eminent Scholar at Tuskegee University for three years. While there she developed a mentoring program for girls in science. Five years ago, she retired from her last job, which was as technical consultant at Raytheon in Birmingham, Alabama, where she studied the education of urban children.

Near the end of the interview, Patrick reflects on people who played an important role in her early education, particularly remembers Anthony Knowledges, her fifth-grade teacher, and Pinkie Bridges, her sixth-grade home room teacher. Harry Morrison at Berkeley also encouraged her and helped her get a scholarship. Patrick's entire career was in industry, but always she was always associated with a university. She found balancing her demanding career with her personal life difficult but rewarding. She is now married to her best friend. Patrick believes that her most important contribution is her work on supercritical extraction, which formed the basis for subsequent research, though being in industry did not afford her to publish many articles. When asked what she would tell aspiring chemical engineers she advises them to persevere but to be careful of their health; chemicals are dangerous. She also advises youngsters to learn from their predecessors.

## INTERVIEWER

**Jeannette E. Brown** has a research MS degree from the University of Minnesota and a BS degree in the Field of Chemistry from Hunter College. She started her industrial career at CIBA Pharmaceutical Co. as a junior chemist, working there for eleven years, and she held the position of Research Chemist at Merck & Co. Inc. for twenty-five years. Brown is a former

Faculty Associate in the department of Pre-College Programs at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, holding the title of New Jersey Statewide Systemic Initiative (NJSSI) Regional Director. She was appointed to the National Science Foundation Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women Minorities and Persons with Disabilities (CEOSE) and served on that committee for six years. She is the 2005 recipient of the American Chemical Society Dreyfus Award for mentoring minorities in science and she is currently working on a book about the history of African-American women chemists.

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