

2006 WILLIAM ALLAN AWARD ADDRESS

Introductory Speech for Dorothy Warburton*

Patricia A. Jacobs



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In June this year, I was asked by Dave Valle if I would introduce Dorothy Warburton, the recipient of this year's William Allan Award. I felt a surge of delight that Dorothy, who is one of my very favorite people, was the recipient of this award and that the American Society of Human Genetics had given me the honor of introducing her.

Dorothy really needs no introduction to this Society, as she has been a very active contributor to human genetics for almost 50 years. She certainly fulfills the criteria for the Allan Award, which is the major award given by the Society in recognition of substantial and far-reaching scientific contributions to human genetics carried out over a sustained period of inquiry.

Some of you may not be aware that Dorothy is a Canadian. She did her B.Sc. degree at McGill University in Montreal, from which she graduated with an honors degree in genetics in 1957. The Genetics Department in McGill was headed by Clarke Fraser, and the class of '57 had only two honors students, who, I understand, were, from a very early stage, friendly rivals. Both of them did exceptionally well, and both are being honored today—yes, the

two students were Dorothy Warburton and David Rimoin. This must be a very proud day for Clarke Fraser, who can seldom, if ever, have had such a vintage year as '57. It is sad that he cannot be with us to bask in reflected glory, but we send him our congratulations.

Dorothy remained in the Genetics Department at McGill and, under Clarke Fraser's tutelage, gained her Ph.D. in 1961. I believe that Dorothy and Clarke are the only student-mentor pair to both be holders of the Allan Award, Dorothy this year and Clarke in 1979.

In 1964, Dorothy left McGill because her husband, Toney, had accepted an appointment at Barnard College in New York City. Dorothy joined the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University and has remained there ever since. She entered Columbia as a research assistant in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and rose through the ranks to become, in 1988, professor of Clinical Genetics and Development, a position she still holds. From 1969 until last year, Dorothy was also director of the Genetic Diagnostic Laboratory. Dorothy managed to combine the running of a large and successful diagnostic laboratory with a full-time career in research and, at the same time, raise four children. This, to my mind, is nothing short of miraculous. When, late in my career, I was offered a position as director of a diagnostic laboratory, I was very apprehensive, as I feared it would be the end of my research. I sought Dorothy's advice, and she told me I'd love it because it would be an endless source of fascinating chromosome abnormalities and would provide lots of interesting data. Influenced by her encouragement, I took the position and found that she was, in this as in so many other things, absolutely correct.

Today, we are here to honor Dorothy for a lifetime contribution to human genetic research that has had as its focus the etiology of human chromosome abnormalities. Perspicaciously, she began her career with a Ph.D. thesis on the "Aetiological Factors in Spontaneous Abortions," written before we had an inkling that the most important etiological factor was an abnormal chromosome constitution. Anyone interested in the etiology of reproductive loss and the epidemiology and etiology of chromosome abnormalities has to end up studying spontaneous abortions, as that is where the great majority of chromosome abnormalities are to be found. This Dorothy has done.

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The majority of her scientific publications are concerned with the genetics and epidemiology of fetal loss. Dorothy was the first to show that the 45,X was associated with a young maternal age; she was also the first to show that trisomy was related to early menopause and the first to convincingly demonstrate that there was a significant recurrence risk for both homotrissomy—that is, repeat occurrence of the same trisomy—and for heterotrissomy—that is, repeat occurrence of different trisomies. Dorothy has also made stellar contributions to the comparative cytogenetics of the great apes, to the genetic mapping of chromosome 13, and to the clinical correlates of chromosome abnormalities. Dorothy's 1991 paper on the outcome of fetuses diagnosed prenatally with a de novo structural chromosome abnormality is still the gold standard that informs genetics counseling worldwide. Dorothy is continuing her research on fetal wastage, but she is also about to embark on a project to identify copy-number changes that cause congenital heart disease and to identify genes involved in heart development.

I greatly admire Dorothy as a scientist and I greatly value her as a friend. We share many scientific interests, and I like nothing better than to discuss science with her, because she has such a marvelous combination of knowledge and common sense. She also has a wonderful sense of humor, and we have shared many occasions that have made us both laugh. While attending a cytogenetic nomenclature meeting at Lake Placid, we were grounded by a huge snowstorm. Dorothy and I, to our eternal credit, discov-

ered a shop that sold Armagnac, and this did much to compensate us for our unenviable situation. I don't think the shop had ever sold a bottle of Armagnac before, and we rapidly became known as the "Armagnac Ladies" because of our daily trek to the shop to buy yet another bottle. Luckily, our consumption of the entire supply of Armagnac in Lake Placid occurred only the day before the blizzard ceased, and we were able to return to civilization.

Dorothy and I were both founding fellows of the American Board of Medical Genetics. We founding fellows set the Board's first examination, and, at the first meeting of the successful candidates, we were asked to remain outside the hall while, we assumed, the newly created members of the Board would unanimously vote to grandfather us into membership. So there we were together with all the other members of the founding board, who included such luminaries as Victor McKusick, Arno Motulsky, and David Rimoin. We waited and waited, and, eventually, an embarrassed emissary appeared from within the hall to tell us that they didn't want us and that we would all have to take and pass the exam if we wanted to practice medical genetics. Most of our colleagues were more than a little shocked by our rejection, but Dorothy and I thought it was hilarious.

Dorothy—I hope to be able to turn to you both for scientific advice and for laughter for many more years, and it gives me the greatest pleasure, on behalf of the American Society of Human Genetics, to present you with this year's Allan Award.