## PROF. MICHAEL R. STALLCUP

2290 Panorama Terrace, Los Angeles, CA 90039

After graduating in 1969 I wanted to go to graduate school in biochemistry. I also decided to try the other coast, so I entered the program at Berkeley. My time there not only initiated my academic research career, but also stimulated my political awakening. At Yale I was exposed for the first time to liberal and radical philosophies, but I was not ready to understand or embrace them, since I was basically uninitiated and more or less uninterested in politics.

After finishing my degree in 1974 I was not ready to leave the Bay Area, so I began my postdoctoral research training in San Francisco. At that time University of California, San Francisco, had just begun to rise from a second-rank academic medical center to its current status as one of the premier medical research institutions in the world. The research atmosphere was electrifying, with some of the best young scientists-in-training in the country to interact with. Recombinant DNA technology and the first biotech company (Genen- tech) were born while I was there. I was privileged to train with two truly great scientists: the legendary Gordon Tomkins, who died unexpectedly while I was in his lab, and Keith Yamamoto, who has become one of the most acclaimed and influential scientists in the country.

While in San Francisco Keith and I and two other postdoctoral research fellows started a tradition of going on a three to six-day backpacking trip in a different location every year. Today we are all research scientists, and, although we live in different cities, we still meet almost every year for a wilderness excursion, in the Sierras of California, the Rockies or San Juan Mountains of Colorado, or the Wind River Range of Wyoming. Nineteen ninety-three will be trip number sixteen.

Almost exactly ten years after graduating from Yale, while I was finishing my postdoctoral research training in San Francisco and looking for an academic faculty position, I played in a tennis game that would change my life. I have played tennis regularly since I was about twelve years old; I still love the game to this day and hope to continue playing for a long time. In spite of my love for the game, I wasn’t really very good for a long time. But when you play a game about once a week for thirty years or so, you tend to improve. But I digress. On this day in May 1979 I went to play tennis at a park near my apartment, where I had played many times before. 1 played doubles with a young woman named Terry Riemer, whom I had never met before, although she also had been playing at this park for many years. We won. My life from that point has been immeasurably enriched. My four years in New Haven and my ten years in the San Francisco Bay Area had been exciting and stimulating, but lonely. For me the loneliness ended on that day. Terry is a California native, who grew up in Los Angeles and then moved to San Francisco for twelve years to revel in the societal revolution/evo- lution that was taking place there in the sixties and seventies. We made the most of my seven remaining months in San Francisco, and at the beginning of 1980 she took the very courageous step of moving with me to Columbia, South Carolina, where I became Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of South Carolina. In June of that year we returned to California and were married. We just passed our thirteenth anniversary. The pleasure of our love and companionship has provided a happy center for my life. I also think that the feeling of well-being has given me a lot of strength and confidence to deal with the constant trials and challenges of an academic career. I hope to bring Terry to our twenty-fifth reunion, so that my classmates can meet this special person who means so much to me.

South Carolina was an interesting experience. It was obviously not one of the top academic institutions in the country, but this had advantages as well as the obvious disadvantages of professional and cultural isolation. The biology department there was good enough to have a number of bright, eager young scientists who, like me, were trying to get their research programs off the ground. Being somewhat off the beaten path of top science, it was a fairly sheltered environment where they tried to foster the development of their new young faculty while they learned the ropes of academia. I was fortunate to get a major grant from the federal government right away. Three years later I succeeded in winning a federal Research Career Development Award, which paid some of my salary in order to relieve me of some of my teaching duties, so that I could spend more time developing my research program.

As many of my classmates realized the first time I opened my mouth at Yale, I grew up in Dallas, Texas. So South Carolina wasn’t too much of a shock for me culturally, although it was a far cry from Berkeley and San Francisco. But Terry was another story. She and the South just didn’t get along. She gave it her best effort for about three years and then started wondering how much longer she could hold out there. Fortunately, the Research Career Development Award and the five-year research grant that went with it proved to be the ticket that got us out of the South and back to the west coast.

 Frankly, having each lived for ten years in San Francisco, Los Angeles was about the last place we thought we would want to live. But it just turned out to be the best place for many reasons: more job opportunities for Terry and me; culture; food; great weather (if you don’t count the smog); a stimulating, heterogeneous mix of people. We moved here in 1985 and into a very interesting, beautiful, old (for Los Angeles) community in the hills near downtown Los Angeles. We decided not to have kids, but we have two silly basset hounds, Tilly (the Hon) and Bridget, whom we love dearly and spoil rotten. They are just as important to us as your kids are to you, so don’t be surprised when you start telling me about your kids, if I tell you about our dogs.

After moving to Los Angeles I still work at USC. But now it’s the University of Southern California instead of the University of South Carolina. I was just promoted to (Full) Professor of Pathology, and I have a secondary appointment with the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. I teach graduate students and medical students, but I spend most of my time running my research program, which is still funded by grants from the federal government. I have also had some funding from the American Cancer Society. At any given time several graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and technicians are usually working under my supervision and paid from the research grants that I have won to fund my research. We are trying to understand how steroid hormones regulate the activities of cells in our bodies. Hormones are the chemical messengers that travel from one organ to another in our bodies. When they reach their target organ, they cause changes in the activity of specific genes in the cells of the target organ. This is basic research, meaning that we are not directly trying to cure any specific disease; we are just trying to understand how biological organisms and their cells work. Results from work like mine provide a basis of knowledge and technology upon which more practical studies to cure specific diseases are based. This type of basic research may sound like a luxury, but the history of research has shown conclusively that practically oriented research cannot succeed without the technology and knowledge base provided by basic research.

As time goes by I have become more and more dedicated to my research. I have been moderately successful as an academician. I have maintained continuous funding for my research by competing for grants from the federal government. I have served on several national grant review panels and have published more than thirty papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals. I have graduated seven students from my lab with Ph.D. degrees, and some of them are now faculty members at other universities or scientists in industry. I have won some local teaching awards from my department. But of all the criteria I can judge my career by, research accomplishments are the most important to me; by that criterion, I am still somewhat disappointed so far. I would like to leave more of a mark on my field than I have so far. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether I will have the opportunity to continue my research much longer. Right now, because of the tight federal budget, funding is terribly difficult to obtain. I have lost one grant, but I still have another one for two more years. New proposals I have submitted recently have been reviewed very favorably, but there were no funds available. If the funding situation doesn’t improve soon...

In spite of my disappointment in my research accomplishments to date, I really love doing and directing my own independent research program. Every day there is a new challenge to meet and new things to learn. This is an exciting time in biomedical research. Due to many technical breakthroughs in the past fifteen years, our understanding of how living organisms function is increasing at an astounding rate right now. The mechanisms of life are truly amazing and beautifully complex. Regardless of whether the advances come from my lab or someone else’s, it is a privilege to participate in this exciting process of discovery, and it is very satisfying to see the wonderful progress being made, both in basic research and in medical diagnosis and treatment.