

1996

B.J. Taparowsky

B.J. Taparowsky attended public schools in Worcester, Massachusetts. In spite of a naturalist upbringing, her personal and academic orientation initially favored literature and history. But as an undergraduate, two biology professors at Boston's Emmanuel College, Donald Procaccini and Charles Dinsmore, stirred her interests in science and were instrumental in encouraging her to do undergraduate research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. There, in David Livingston's lab, Taparowsky remembers seeing "science in action" for the first time.

Taparowsky eventually majored in biology at Emmanuel, graduating magna cum laude with a B.A. in 1976. With Dinsmore's encouragement, Taparowsky pursued graduate studies at Brown University, where ASCB past-president Susan Gerbi was Taparowsky's advisor. Gerbi recalls that Taparowsky was one of her first graduate students and was "very diligent and hard working." It was Gerbi who encouraged Taparowsky to join the ASCB in the fall of 1976.

Upon completion of her Ph.D. in 1982, Taparowsky moved to the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory to work in Michael Wigler's lab. Her studies on the human Harvey-ras and N-ras oncogenes revealed the molecular basis of cellular transformation by these oncogenes and helped shape what would become her life's interest. Taparowsky also married biologist Steve Konieczny during this time.

In 1984, Taparowsky relocated to the University of Virginia to be closer to her husband and to begin postdoctoral studies in Tom Parsons' lab. While at UVA, Taparowsky continued to pursue her interest in ras, but also began studying the myc oncogene. Parsons recalls that Taparowsky came to his lab "after a very successful and productive postdoctoral period in Mike Wigler's laboratory. Hot on the trail of the function of ras, she began studies to look at the interactions of myc and ras in mouse fibroblasts. Coming to a laboratory where the 'mother of all oncogenes', Src, was the main focus, B.J. took up the challenge to teach us the power and importance of ras. From the first day in the laboratory, her enthusiasm and commitment to research on oncogenes was clearly evident. Always enthusiastic, excitable, supportive, and curious, she became a role model for students and postdocs alike. B.J. has continued to be a careful and well-respected experimentalist and a caring mentor. For B.J., science is challenging, exciting and demanding and at the same time rewarding. She continues to convey these important lessons to her young students and postdocs."

Near the completion of her postdoc, Taparowsky and her husband began looking for faculty positions, and soon both were able to find jobs at Purdue. At the time, Taparowsky knew of the reluctance of most universities, including Purdue, to hire a married couple. Today, Taparowsky says that there are several married couples in various science departments at Purdue and she hopes that she and her husband have played a part in Purdue recognizing that such hirings make good business sense in that they are

accommodating to couples and can mature into a valuable academic asset to a university community.

At Purdue, Taparowsky's laboratory is interested in the molecular basis of cellular transformation. In particular, her lab has been examining the role of two distinct proto-oncogenes, ras and myc, in the physiology of normal cells and investigating how alterations in the expression of these genes contribute to the transformed phenotype of cancer cells. Her lab's interest in these two oncoproteins stems from the fact that ras and myc were among the first cellular oncogenes to be associated with human cancers and from the availability of numerous experimental model systems (including the C3H10T1/2 system developed by Taparowsky) to examine the individual as well as the "cooperative" effects of these two oncoproteins in cellular transformation.

A recent recruit to the ASCB's Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Committee, Taparowsky first became aware of WICB through Susan Gerbi and Dorothy Skinner, and was honored by the group when she received the 1991 WICB Junior Award. Taparowsky's contributions to the Committee are influenced by her belief that education is just one part of the Committee's goals: there is also a critical need to prepare scientists in planning their careers. Taparowsky feels that "careers can evolve" in science and that the competitive nature of the profession means that careful planning can be critical for success. Taparowsky hopes that through the WICB Committee's publications and programs, such as the luncheon focusing on career issues, which she helped organize at the 1995 Annual Meeting, younger people will be encouraged and supported as they start out and become aware of the challenges and choices they will encounter as their careers progress. She also believes that young men in science face many (although not all!) of the problems that women do, and that the WICB Committee's goals apply equally well to both genders.

At home in West Lafayette, Taparowsky and her husband's consuming interest outside of work is their two children, Matthew, 5 and Peter, 3. Taparowsky has been a Scholar of the Leukemia Society of America since 1991.