

Interview Profile: Dr. Carola Blitzman Eisenberg, M.D.
Submitted by Tacey A. Rosolowski
25 June 2008

This interview was conducted on 10-11 June 2008 at the home of psychiatrist Dr. Carola B. Eisenberg in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D. was the interviewer. Comfortably seated in her living room and surrounded by her collection of Chinese paintings, Dr. Eisenberg treated this interview as an opportunity for a life review. On each day there were two interview sessions of approximately 2 ½ hours each, divided by breaks for lunch. The total interview is 10 hours, 20 minutes long. Dr. Eisenberg brings a psychiatrist's temperament to the narratives of her life and professional experiences. She is a candid, observant, and self-reflective interview subject.

Dr. Eisenberg (89 years old) was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is now semi-retired from Harvard University Medical School. Dr. Eisenberg received the Alma Dea Morani Renaissance Woman in Medicine Award in 2002, the same year that a Nobel Prize was shared by several human rights organizations, including Physicians for Human Rights, co-founded by Dr. Eisenberg. During the first hour and a half she looks back over her (Socialist) family background and education in Buenos Aires, including her parents' commitment to educating daughters at a time when girls were only required to attend school until the age of twelve. She weaves a detailed (and surprising) portrait of her own personality while describing the social climate for girls and women as she attended the Liceo Nacional De Senoritas (BS '33). In the next hour, she discusses the early emergence of her social conscience and how, under her prodding, a School of Psychiatric Social Work was established at the Hospicio De Las Mercedes and granted her an MA in 1935. She entered medical school at the University of Buenos Aires (with only a handful of other women), earning her MD in 1944. She details the personal and professional factors that motivated her to apply for fellowships abroad: she chose a fellowship from Johns Hopkins Medical School over the opportunity to study with Anna Freud in Europe.

During the afternoon session, Dr. Eisenberg compares the climate for women in the U.S. and Argentina, her education at Johns Hopkins (where she "really learned psychiatry"), and the personal turmoil of adjusting to a new culture and meeting her first husband, forensic psychiatrist Manfred S. Guttmacher (1898-1966). Dr. Eisenberg states that her first priority was to be a wife and a mother: she narrates how she stopped work for a few years to raise her young children, then returned to work and experienced the grief of her husband's unexpected death. After marrying Leon Eisenberg (1922- ; pediatric psychiatrist and, now, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University Medical School) she moved to Boston. She describes how her career "took off," resulting in her appointment as Dean of Students at MIT (the first woman dean at MIT), then Dean of Student Affairs at the Harvard Medical School.

During the second day of interviewing she traces her maturing career with special attention to her experiences as a woman professional. In the morning session she expands on her experiences at MIT and Harvard. She discusses her commitment to improving the quality of life of students socialized in the cold rigors of scientific training: she created peer groups, sexuality discussion groups, and opportunities for education overseas. She worked with other women through official and unofficial channels to create discussion groups for women students and faculty. She recognizes that her

liberal views and personal openness dovetailed with the spirit of the sixties and seventies. She outlines her efforts to create support for women in academia and her work at the Federal level to increase women's involvement in the sciences. In the afternoon session she narrates how her social conscience found a different outlet when she was invited to El Salvador to investigate human rights violations. Dr. Eisenberg poignantly describes the horrors she witnessed and the ensuing work done by the organization she helped to found, Physicians for Human Rights. In semi-retirement, Dr. Eisenberg continues to work for the organization and to serve as a spokesperson for human rights, her ongoing passion. At the conclusion of the interview, Dr. Eisenberg discusses her personal life and relationships.

This interview offers an exposé of a woman whose life has become rich through taking risks, rising to challenges, and maintaining a vital family and social life.