



Sarah Elizabeth Stewart
1905–1976

OBITUARY

Sarah Elizabeth Stewart

Sarah Elizabeth Stewart, M.D., Ph.D., died of cancer on November 27, 1976, in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

Dr. Stewart was born on August 16, 1905, in Tecatillan, Jalisco, Mexico, where her father was a mining engineer and her mother a native Mexican. Throughout her life she remained fluent in her mother's tongue.

When the family moved back to the United States, Dr. Stewart went to schools in Oregon and then to college at New Mexico State University, from which she was graduated in 1927. With characteristic energy, she had taken sufficient courses in both science and home economics to warrant a degree in both. Eager to inquire into things "unheard of," she approached the president of the university and requested and received the two degrees. She delayed graduate studies in microbiology when she learned that it would take an additional two years of training. However, she later resumed her studies at the University of Massachusetts and earned a master's degree in 1930. From 1933 to 1935 she was a Research Fellow at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. In 1935 she joined the United States Public Health Service as a bacteriologist and, while on active duty in Washington, she pursued a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. She received the degree in 1939.

In 1944 Dr. Stewart volunteered and was appointed an Instructor at Georgetown University School of Medicine in the Department of Bacteriology and Immunology. Her interest in human disease had developed to such an extent that, in 1947, she resigned from the Public Health Service and entered Georgetown University School of Medicine. She became its first woman graduate in 1949, and the only one in the memory of the faculty to complete the course in less than the usual four years. She reentered the Public Health Service with an internship at the Public Health Service Hospital on Staten Island, New York, and then went to the Public Health Service Hospital in Baltimore, where she began her research in virology and oncology. In 1954 she came to Bethesda and the National Cancer Institute.

After eight papers on various aspects of microbiology, Dr. Stewart produced in 1953 the first in the field of oncology: the description of a filterable agent present in AKR leukemic tissues and notes of a sarcoma produced by the same agent. Her microbiological background and interest in human disease, coupled with a fascination with cancer, made her a pioneer in that early period when oncology was not considered a proper pursuit for microbiologists, and virology not proper training for cancer re-

search. She continued working at this frontier for the next 20 years, writing papers on viruses, such as lymphocytic choriomeningitis, but more often on those agents isolated from tumor tissues. She was also interested in tumor therapy and, with Vic Haas, wrote on the sparing effect of amethopterin and guanazolo in mice infected with the lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus. In 1958 Dr. Stewart published her epochal studies, in collaboration with Bernice Eddy and N. G. Borgese, on the production of cancer in mice inoculated with a virus that they had grown in tissue culture and subsequently named "polyoma." Dr. Stewart made signal contributions to the identification of other agents, including herpes simplex, Burkitt's, and C-type viruses.

Her honors include: Doctor of Laws from New Mexico State University, an honorary degree from Georgetown University in 1972, the Lenghi Award of the Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei in Rome, the Lucy Wortham James Award of the James Ewing Society, the Medical "Men" of Georgetown, the Heart Award of the Philadelphia Variety Club, the Federal Woman's Award, Alpha Omega Alpha, the Daughters of Penelope Salute to Women Award in 1972, and the John Carroll Award in 1975.

For most of her life Sarah lived with her mother who survives her and who went with her on many of the trips she loved to take. Her favorite place to relax was her summer home on Chesapeake Bay. Sarah's fields of interest included all of biology, and she is widely remembered for her concern and affection for the swans on the Chesapeake. She spent her last days in an apartment overlooking the Intercoastal Waterway in Florida.

In 1970, Dr. Stewart retired from the Public Health Service and accepted the position of Professor in the Department of Pathology at Georgetown University. She became ill in 1973 and resigned her academic appointment in May 1974.

On a beautiful and sad morning in Washington, May 23, 1977, she was interred at the Rock Creek Cemetery during a brief graveside service. Her many friends assisted at the memorial service at the Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, Maryland, with eulogies by three of them: her former associate Dr. Harold L. Stewart, Dr. John Landon of the Mason Research Institute, and Dr. John P. Utz of the Georgetown University School of Medicine.

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