

May 13, 2011

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Friday, May 13, 2011. Beautiful sunny day, yesterday in New York; very chilly at night.

Yesterday I went down to Rockefeller University at 66th and York to their annual Women & Science Lecture/Luncheon. This was a first for me – both luncheon and visiting the place.

The institution's campus sits right next to the New York/Presbyterian Hospital complex that stretches from 67th up to 71st Street. It was founded in 1901 by **John D. Rockefeller** as the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, specifically and exclusively for biomedical research. Nine years later they built the first hospital devoted to clinical research. After 1950, the institute expanded to include graduate education and training new generations of scientists "to become research leaders around the world."



The staff gardens at Rockefeller University, yesterday at 1 pm.



Guests taking their places at table after the lecture.



The table settings.

Today it is world renowned sitting up off the avenue on the gentle knoll behind the imposing, tall iron gates. I've ridden by it thousands of times without every having gone inside. It was always significant personally because I remember as a child being told about it by my mother. When our family lived in the city in the 1930s, my mother took both my sisters to the Rockefeller hospital to be treated for serious tonsillitis.

She recounted the story more than once for a couple of reasons: 1. My sisters got excellent treatment, and my mother was advised not to have their tonsils removed; and 2. Their excellent care and medical treatment came without charge. In the middle of the Great Depression, in a household where there was very little of anything including money, this was a godsend.

They named it Rockefeller University in 1965. In its history, 23 of its scientists have won Nobel Prizes, 21 have won Lasker Awards and 14 have been award the National Medal of Science, the highest science award given by the United States.



Nancy Kissinger.



Silda Spitzer.



Susan Braddock.



Marcia Mishaan, Renee Rockefeller, and Gigi Mortimer.



Jean Pearman and Becky de Kertanguy.



Sydney Shuman, Stanley Shuman, and Ludmila Hess.



Cori Bargman and Barbara Vogelstein.



Frederic Malle and Leslie B. Vossall.

Entering the campus for the first time today, I was swept up by the beautiful gardens and landscape. It was little a little floral paradise in the middle of the teeming city. Behind those gates is a rather large tract of land, much of it covered by buildings but also with magnificent

park like spaces and terraces for staff and students.

The Women & Science Committee was started in 1997 by **Sydney Shuman, Lydia Forbes, Isabel Furlaud** and **Nancy Kissinger**. Among their objectives, besides helping to raise funds, was to increase the number of Rockefeller women scientists. I'd been invited a few times before but could never make it.

This annual luncheon is a fund-raiser, and very successful, with several hundred guests, mainly women. The Committee is made up with a lot of familiar names, such as: **Frances Beatty Adler, Annette de la Renta, Gretchen Grisanti, Agnes Gund, Marlene Hess, Nathalie Kaplan, Cynthia Whitehead, Daisy Soros, Ann Tenenbaum, Evelyn Lauder, Alexandra Lebenthal, Hillie Mahoney, Gigi Mortimer, Janet Ross**, to name only a few. The Chairs of this lecture/luncheon were **Katerina Alevizaki-Dracopouklos, Judith Roth Berkowitz, Dr. Samantha Boardman Rosen, Pat Rosenwald, Lulu Wang.**

Yesterday's "lecture" was a forum discussion of "Scent and Behavior: An Evocative Relationship" conducted by **Dr. Marc Tessier-Lavigne**, President of Rockefeller University, with **Dr. Leslie Vosshall**, Robin Chemers Neustein Professor and Head of the Laboratory of Neurogenetics and Behavior at RU; and **Frederic Malle**, Founder and Owner of Editions de Parfum Frederic Malle.

Americans are familiar with the Malle name because of his late brother, the film director **Louis Malle**, who was married to **Candace Bergen**. The French and Europeans have long been familiar with the Malle family name because they have been in the scent and fragrance business prominently for generations.

Dr. Vosshall started the session with a lecture on scent, and our relationship to it. Completely enthralling for even the least inquisitive of us. The nose, she told us, is the only part of the brain not located in the brain. She went into some detail about how scents are broken down molecularly and how they affect each of us in a variety of ways – physically, psychologically – and how they influence our lives on a moment to moment basis. All of it very relatable to daily living and all of it fascinating.



On the left Elaine Fuchs, PhD. Dr. Fuchs is a geneticist who studies the molecular basis of normal skin growth and the fundamental biology of skin cancers and other skin diseases. She has received numerous honors including the National Medal of Science in 2009, the L'Oreal-UNESCO Award in Life Sciences last year, and she had to leave the lunch early to take the train to Albany where she was received the 2011 Albany Medical Award, one of the largest awards of its kind in the world, which she is sharing with two others.



Suzanne McDonough.



Paul Austin.



Frederic Malle.



Marnie Imhoff, VP for Development at Rockefeller University, with Sydney Shuman, a founding chair of the Women & Science initiative.



Hilary Geary Ross.

One of the many things we learned from the lecture and ensuing discussion was that insects are more attracted to certain individuals by their natural scents. Finding a scent that repels the malaria bearing insect, would be, in essence, a cure. I was told Dr. Vosshall is on that trail now.

Mr. Malle added the side to the story that we are most familiar with because it involves how we use scents to dress up our lives (and ourselves). Perfume/fragrance is a huge business in the world. It takes 6 to 18 months to develop a perfume from start to finish. Its signature is a combination of personality (of the creator) and culture (of the buyer). He told us that different cultures are drawn to different scents.

Americans, he said, like “sweet” scents and Americans are also the largest consumers in the world of sugar in our diet. This is not coincidence.



Lorna Graev and Sean Driscoll.



Alexandra Kotur.



Deeda Blair and Kate Betts.



Lee Auchincloss and Duane Hampton.



Patricia Shiah.

Aside from being informative on an ordinary basis, the forum provided an insight into ourselves as operating creatures with senses as basic and crucial as all other creatures.

Afterwards there was a luncheon for the several hundred guests in a large tent set up outside the auditorium, and catered by Glorious Foods.

The Women In Science Committee at Rockefeller University is another example of how the kind of women who once served (with devotion) as volunteers in institutions such as hospitals in previous generations, are now taking a larger, more responsible executive roles in the enhancement and support of those institutions. Like the aforementioned Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Care Center, and the Women's Committee of the Central Park Conservancy, the Women In Science Committee is another example of how the modern volunteer is providing management skills and systems that could rival any great corporation or institution. And as a result they are making notable differences (and enhancements).



The main building (Founder's Hall) up the drive from York Avenue gates.
