



July 21, 1988

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Dr. Henry W. Blackburn, Jr.
Department of Medicine
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dear Dr. Blackburn, Jr:

Elizabeth Louise Barrett-Connor has been nominated for a MacArthur Fellowship. I am writing to ask you for a confidential evaluation of her for our Selection Committee.

The enclosed brochure describes our Program. We ask our designated Nominators (who serve confidentially) to submit to us names of people who, whatever their previous accomplishments, show great promise of doing significant work and are at critical points in their careers. Our Selection Committee reviews the files on a monthly basis. MacArthur Fellows are not accountable to the Foundation for the use of their Fellowships.

First, could you tell us what the nominee has achieved, and set it in the context of other work in the field? Second, could you compare the nominee for us with others in the same field or comparable fields who are at the same stage of their careers? Third, what is the nominee likely to achieve (with or without a Fellowship), and would a Fellowship increase the probability that the nominee's work will be significant? That is, what constraints are there which a Fellowship could relieve? Finally, whom else could we write to for an evaluation (positive/*m. origin.* or negative) of the nominee?

This inquiry is strictly confidential and will be used only to help our Selection Committee make a decision on the nominee. Since many more people are nominated than can receive Fellowships, we ask that you not contact the nominee about this under any circumstances.

If at all possible, we would appreciate receiving your written comments within six weeks. If you would rather call us than write, please feel free to do that.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Paul Shullenberger
Assistant Director
MacArthur Fellows Program

PS/mg
encl.

EXCERPT FROM THE NOMINATION OF ELIZABETH BARRETT-CONNOR:

As an epidemiologist she has demonstrated versatility and ingenuity, and although she manages to get funded for research projects that "call" for grant applications, she has difficulty getting funded for the kinds of courageous (but sound) epidemiological work she would like to do. She is also weighed down with heavy teaching, administrative duties, and her role as a mother. The nominator gives two examples of B.-C.'s challenging conventional wisdom: on the question of the utility of the sputum culture for the diagnosis of pneumococcal pneumonia (not a sensitive test, her results show), and whether overweight adults might have less peripheral vascular resistance than leaner adults for a given level of blood pressure, and might therefore be at reduced risk (indeed, thin hypertensives have a poorer prognosis). Then two examples of B.-C.'s originality: in high intake of potassium as an anti-stroke measure, and in high levels of DHEA and DHEAS (the steroid hormones produced in largest quantity in man) as associated with cardiovascular health. B.-C.'s research areas have tended to be in advance of general interest of other investigators and funding agencies. For example, B.-C. worked in sickle cell anemia before this was a politically fashionable disease, in geriatrics before it was designated a primary research area, and in diabetes as a heart disease risk factor before investigators outside of the U.S. had paid much attention to this association. This has also been true of her hormone work....Her broad range of interests has enhanced her potential to be original and contemporary, and has also permitted some widely quoted review papers, still considered to be the best in the area by others. In this group are papers on pellagra (#8), anemia and infection (#29), infection and sickle-cell anemia (#25), tuberculosis in physicians (#50), prophylaxis of sexually transmitted disease (#44), obesity and coronary heart disease (#141), health policy (#155), and postmenopausal estrogens (#152). Although the above attributes are attractive in retrospect, they do not promote easy funding. Research money tends not to be invested in risky ideas and untested hypotheses--most of the best work of B.-C. has been done free or "bootlegged." Support without strings would be used to test other innovative ideas in collaboration with promising young investigators.