



Mary-Claire King

Class of 1963

MARY-CLAIRE KING, PHD, is American Cancer Society Professor in the Department of Medicine and the Department of Genome Sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. She was the first to prove that breast cancer is inherited in some families, as the result of mutations in the gene that she named BRCA1. In addition to the inherited breast and ovarian cancer, her research interests include the genetic bases of schizophrenia, the genetic causes of Mendelian disorders, and human genetic diversity and evolution. She pioneered the use of DNA sequencing for human rights investigations, developing the approach of sequencing mitochondrial DNA preserved in human remains, then applying this method to the identification of kidnapped children in Argentina and subsequently to cases of human rights violations on six continents.

King grew up in Wilmette and Winnetka and attended New Trier High School, where she spent many happy hours playing flute in the symphony orchestra and the concert band, and piccolo in the marching band. She received her BA cum laude in Mathematics from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, her PhD in Genetics from the University of California at Berkeley, and her postdoctoral training at UC San Francisco. Her PhD dissertation with Allan Wilson in 1973 was the demonstration that DNA sequences of humans and chimpanzees are 99% identical. She was professor at UC Berkeley from 1976-1995 and at the University of Washington in Seattle since 1995.

King has won numerous awards for her work and has served on the Advisory Committee to the Director of NIH, the National Commission on Breast Cancer of the President's Cancer Panel, the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (COSEPUP), and multiple councils and study sections of the NIH and the National Academy of Sciences. She was consultant to the Commission on the Disappearance of Persons of the Republic of Argentina and carried out DNA identifications for the United Nations War Crimes Tribunals. She is Past President of the American Society of Human Genetics.

