

Elizabeth Blackburn - Our Nobel Laureate

Elizabeth Blackburn has been awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in the category of Medicine or Physiology. She shares the award with Carol Greider and Jack Szostak. Her particular interest has been in the telomere, a structure at the end of the chromosomes which protects the chromosomes.

Nobel prizes were first awarded in 1901, and to date there have been 763 male and 40 female laureates. The first woman to receive a Nobel Prize (in 1903, in the field of Physics) was Marie Curie. Elizabeth Blackburn is certainly in good company.

Elizabeth was born in Tasmania in 1948 and received her early secondary education at the Broadland House Church of England Grammar School in Launceston. She came to Melbourne in 1965 to finish her schooling at The University High School.

Elizabeth Blackburn's name appears on two of our Honour Boards - as the winner of a General Exhibition and a State Senior Scholarship in 1965. Our archives have also brought forth a photograph of Form 6E which shows Elizabeth in the front row, not far from the form mistress, the late and much-loved Mavis Jones.

Elizabeth graduated from the University of Melbourne with a BSc in 1970 and the degree of MSc in 1972. She then proceeded to the UK, to Cambridge University, to gain a PhD in 1975. She undertook post-doctoral studies in the USA at Yale University, before moving to the University of California at Berkeley and ultimately to her present location at the University of California, San Francisco. She is the Morris Herzstein Professor of Biology and Physiology. She has received many accolades for her work and is currently the president-elect of the American Association for Cancer Research.

Prof Blackburn has also been at the centre of controversy, in that she was removed from the President's Advisory Council on Bioethics (to which she had been appointed in 2001) by a directive of President Bush when her advocacy of human embryonic cell research brought her into conflict with White House policy.

In 2007, Prof Blackburn was listed among Time Magazine's "100 Most Influential People in the World".

In her private life, Elizabeth is married to John W. Sedat, and has one son, Benjamin.

The University High School salutes Elizabeth Blackburn.