CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

# CAROLINE KISKER

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of Interviews
Conducted by

Nicole Nelson

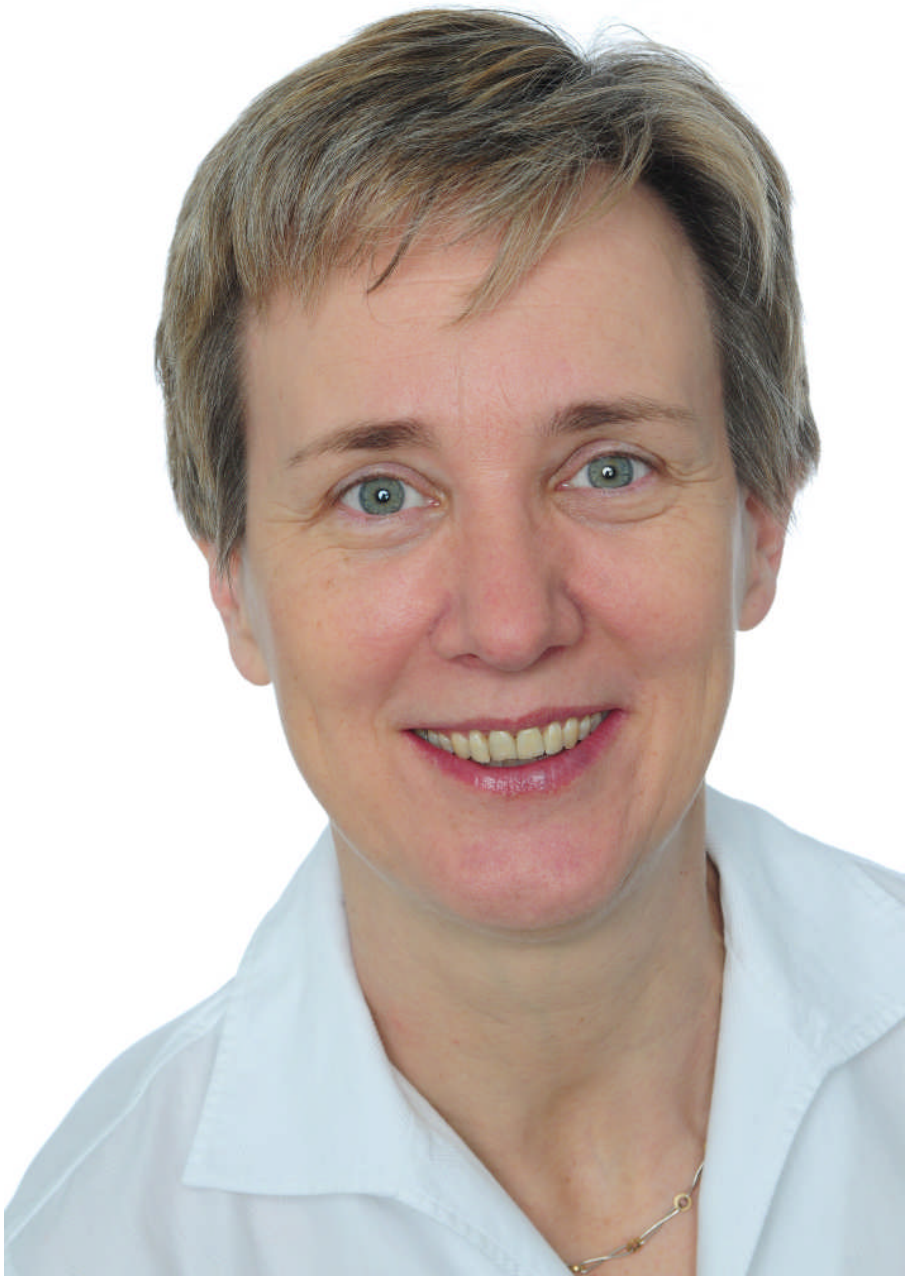
at

The Rudolf Virchow Center
Würzburg, Germany

on

18 and 19 June 2008

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)



Caroline Kisker

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**CAROLINE F. KISKER**

1964 Born in Berlin, Germany on 1 May

## Education

1991 *Diplom*, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany
1994 Ph.D., Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany

## Professional Experience

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California
1994-1997 Postdoctorate, Biochemistry

State University of New York, Stony Brook
1998-2001 Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacological Sciences
2001-2006 Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacological Sciences
2006-present Adjunct Professor, Department of Pharmacological Sciences

Rudolf Virchow Center for Experimental Biology, University of Würzburg, Germany
2006-present Professor

## Honors

1995 Karl Ramsauer Award for Ph.D. Thesis
1995-1997 Postdoctoral Fellowship *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*
1998-1999 Targeted Research Opportunity Award SUNY Stony Brook
2000-2004 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences

## ABSTRACT

**Caroline F. Kisker** grew up in West Berlin, West Germany, where she attended the John F. Kennedy German-American grammar school. After completing her *Abitur*, Kisker planned to study medicine, but due to the complicated university placement lottery system Kisker was not able to matriculate at a university. In the interim, while working as a medical apprentice, she decided to pursue biochemistry at the Freie Universität in Berlin. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Kisker witnessed an influx of East German students to West Berlin and the universities there. She joined the large laboratory of Wolfram Saenger and throughout the course of her *Diplom* and Ph.D., Kisker had the opportunity to conduct laboratory work in Zurich, Switzerland and Frankfurt, Germany with Nobel Laureate Hartmut Michel. Her doctoral thesis centered on the determination of medically relevant tetracycline repressor protein, the results of which she published in *Science*. While working in the Saenger laboratory, Kisker met her husband Hermann Schindelin. After completing their doctorates, they both pursued postdoctoral research in Douglas C. Rees's laboratory at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). At Caltech, Kisker solved the sulfite oxidase structure and published it in *Cell*. At the end of her time as a postdoctoral fellow, Kisker accepted a position as a faculty member at State University of New York, Stony Brook. In 2000 Kisker received the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences award and in 2006 she moved to the Rudolf Virchow Center at the University of Würzburg in Germany. She continues her research on structure-based drug design and DNA repair through the tools of structural biology. Throughout her oral history Kisker discusses the differences between the German and American educational and scientific systems and many of the challenges associated with being a woman in science, especially having to balance work with family life during the transition from Stony Brook back to Germany. Kisker also talks about the ways in which structural biology has changed throughout her career in response to new technologies and the ways in which funding affects her research and research choices.

## INTERVIEWER

**Nicole Nelson** graduated with a B.Sc. in Genetics and Social and Political Thought from the University of Western Ontario in 2004. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Science and Technology studies program at Cornell University. Nicole is interested in the sociology of contemporary biomedicine, especially genetics and model organisms. Her dissertation project is an ethnographic study of the social processes involved in developing animal models (especially mouse models) for studying the genetics of complex human behaviors. In addition to her dissertation research, Nicole works as a research assistant conducting interviews for several projects, including the CHF's oral history project for Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**


Early Education 1

Growing up in the enclosed city of West Berlin, West Germany. Grammar school at the John F. Kennedy German-American school in both German and English. Interest in medicine and decision to study biochemistry. *Abitur* and University lottery. Biochemistry at the Freie Universität. Differences between the American and German education systems. Interest in gymnastics. Trends regarding women in science.

Scholastics, Biochemistry, and Scientific Interests 19

Biochemistry studies at the Freie Universität with Wolfram Saenger. Interest in macromolecular crystallography. Meeting husband Hermann Schindelin. Working in laboratories in Zurich, Switzerland and Frankfurt, Germany.

Practicing Science in the United States and Abroad 24

Postdoctoral positions in the United States. Two-body problem. Path to professorship in Germany and *Habilitation*. Max Planck Institutes. Funding. University system in Germany.

Berlin, Germany 30

Fall of the Berlin Wall. Influx of East German students. Resources available to West and East German scientists. Travel to East Berlin.

Undergraduate Thesis and Graduate Research and Technologies 35

Structure of Tetracycline Repressor Complex. Publication in *Science*. Crystallization and structure determination. Synchrotron in Hamburg, Germany. Synchrotron technology. Laboratory management.

Postdoctoral Research 66

California Institute of Technology. Douglas C. Rees. Collaboration with Amgen. Gamma carbonic anyhydrase from an *archaeon*. Sulfite oxidase structure published in *Cell*. Rees's management style. Advances in computing and crystallography.

State University of New York, Stony Brook 79

Looking for faculty positions. Decision to stay in the United States. Difficulty of finding students. Management style. Interest in protein-DNA interactions.

Pew Scholar in Biomedical Sciences 90
Research on DNA repair. Familiarity with Pew. Annual Meetings. Costa Rica. Visa problems. Importance of bringing along the family. Interacting with people outside of structural biology. Publishing with Sylvie Doublié.

Funding Science 102
Applying for National Institutes of Health grants. Department of Energy funds. Problems associated with needing preliminary data in crystallography. Reviewing grants with Hermann.

Rudolf Virchow Center, University of Würzburg 107
Decision to move back to Germany. Martin Lohse. Transitioning graduate students between Stony Brook and Würzburg. Difficulty of moving with school-age children.

Structural Biology and Biomedical Science 112
Moving beyond structure determination. Biochemistry. Structure based drug design. Sharing data and material. Competition.

Career and Family 124
Balancing life and work. Sharing responsibilities. Research collaborations with Hermann. Science education. *Rudi's Forschercamp*. Undergraduate education. Problem solving.

Index 133

**INDEX**


**A**

*Abitur*, 2, 7, 8, 12, 18, 21
Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 69
Amgen, 68, 127
Antibiotics, 38, 66, 96
Archae, 69

**B**

Bacteria, 38, 42, 113, 119, 127
Baden-Württemburg, Germany, 9, 32
Bavaria, Germany, 7, 9
Berlin, Germany, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 15, 21, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 56, 61, 66, 73, 84, 107, 122
  John F. Kennedy School, 2
Biochemistry, 2, 3, 7, 12, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 28, 36, 56, 96, 130
Biology, 2, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 38, 87, 129
  structural biology, 22, 23, 31, 42, 53, 63, 77, 79, 96, 98, 103, 104, 108, 113, 114, 116, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124, 126, 127
Biosynthesis, 119
Bjorkman, Pamela J., 91
Boston, Massachusetts, 1, 6

**C**

California Institute of Technology, 62, 67, 68, 73, 91
*Cell*, 70, 88
Chemistry, 1, 2, 7, 10, 12, 16, 18, 19, 21, 57, 89, 129
  inorganic chemistry, 20, 21
  physical chemistry, 19
Chen, Paul J., 66, 84, 86
Chicago, Illinois, 79, 80, 106
Children, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 63, 82, 101, 107, 110, 111, 112, 124, 125, 128, 129
cis-Platin, 101
Collaborations, 68, 69, 76, 77, 97, 124
Costa Rica, 91, 92, 93, 94, 106
Crystallography, 22, 23, 42, 43, 44, 66, 79, 117
  crystallization, 41, 43, 104, 106, 121, 122
  diffraction, 43, 45, 50, 73, 116
  electron density maps, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52
  selenomethionine substitution, 44, 116

**D**

Deisenhofer, Johann, 42, 122
DFG [*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*], 108
*Diplom*, 36, 130
DNA, 32, 38, 39, 40, 86, 88, 90, 91, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 113, 114, 122, 123, 124, 126, 129
  DNA repair, 21, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 113, 114, 122, 123, 124
DOE [Department of Energy], 90, 103
Doublié , Sylvie, 97

**E**

*E. coli*, 42
*EMBO* [*The European Molecular Biology Organization]*, 69, 86, 97, 122
Enemark, John, 70, 77
Enzymes, 27, 70, 84, 88, 89, 91, 99, 119
  DNA polymerase, 89, 98
  nuclease, 101
  RB69, 98
  UvrA, 99, 100, 101, 102
  UvrB, 86, 99, 100, 102, 122
  UvrC, 99, 100, 101, 102
Ernst Moritz Arndt University of Greifswald, 41
Ethics, 126

**F**

FASEB [Federation of American Societies Experimental Biology], 27, 123
Ferry, James G., 69
Frankfurt, Germany, 3, 23, 41
Freie Universität Berlin, 3, 36
Funding, 26, 27, 28, 78, 82, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 99, 102, 103, 104, 105, 112, 131

**G**

Genes, 89, 101, 120
Germany, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 17, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 45, 49, 57, 62, 63, 66, 67, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 82, 83, 91, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 122, 126, 127, 129
  Berlin Wall, 30, 32, 34
  East Berlin, 32, 33
  East Germany, 31, 32, 33, 34
  West Berlin, 30, 32, 34
  West Germany, 30, 33
Göttingen, Germany, 82
Grants. *See* Funding
*Gymnasium*, 7, 9, 16

**H**

*Habilitation*, 25, 76
Hamburg, Germany, 45, 46
Harrison, Stephen C., 66, 67
Harvard University, 1, 67, 102
*Hauptschule*, 8
Hinrichs, Winfried, 41
Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 26, 77
Huber, Robert, 42

**J**

*Journal of Molecular Biology*, 60

**L**

Lederle Pharmaceuticals, 66, 119
Lohse, Martin, 107, 108

**M**

MacKinnon, Roderick, 112
Matthews, Brian W., 80
Max-Planck Institute, 24, 26, 82
Michel, Hartmut, 3, 23, 42
*Molecular Cell*, 97
Moscow, Russia, 32
Mycobacterium tuberculosis, 89, 119

**N**

NIH [National Institutes of Health], 26, 27, 102, 105, 108, 112
  R01 grants, 27, 88, 89, 90, 99, 102, 103, 104, 109, 112
  study sections, 103
Nobel Prize, 3, 23, 42
NSF [National Science Foundation], 105

**O**

Oregon State Health & Science University, 80
Oregon State University, 80

**P**

Pasadena, California, 68
Pew Charitable Trusts
  annual meetings, 91, 93, 95
  Pew Scholars, 90, 91, 93, 97, 105, 106, 112
  Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Award, 90, 91, 92, 93, 97, 98, 99, 102, 103, 105, 106
Pharmacology, 23
Physics, 7, 10, 17, 19, 35, 129
Plasmids, 89, 120, 121, 126
*PLoS Biology*, 21
Post-Doctorate, 3, 4, 17, 24, 25, 26, 27, 37, 41, 43, 44, 49, 50, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 85, 106, 108, 122, 123, 126
Proteins, 23, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 54, 60, 62, 68, 69, 70, 73, 87, 88, 96, 100, 101, 104, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 123, 127

gamma carbonic anhydrase, 69
membrane protein, 23, 112
protein membrane, 23, 38, 112, 113
sulfite oxidase, 70, 77, 88, 89, 102
tetracycline repressor, 36, 38, 39, 41, 46, 48, 54, 60, 63, 66, 88, 89, 116
XPD, 21, 101, 123
Publishing, 36, 60, 71, 97, 98, 102, 114, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 131

**R**

*Realschule*, 8
Rees, Douglas C., 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 77, 88, 89, 95, 102, 104
Roderick, Steven L., 69
Rudolf Virchow Center, 23, 26, 76, 107, 108, 115, 128
*Forscherreporter*, 129
*Rudi's Forschercamp*, 128
*Rudi's Forschercamp*, 129

**S**

Saenger, Wolfram, 3, 36, 39, 40, 60, 66
San Francisco, California, 95
SAT [scholastic aptitude test], 14
Schindelin, Hermann, 22, 23, 51, 53, 62, 63, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 80, 82, 84, 86, 87, 88, 93, 97, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 114, 127, 130
*Science*, 36, 41, 60, 69, 71
Searle Scholars Program, 91, 106
Sigler, Paul B., 66, 67
Slovakia, 32
State University of New York, Stony Brook, 23, 24, 49, 54, 58, 63, 75, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 91, 105, 107, 109, 126, 129, 131
Center for Molecular Medicine, 23
Steitz, Thomas A., 66, 67
Stem Cells, 126
Synchrotrons, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 80, 81, 117

**T**

Technician, 26, 28, 61, 86, 87
Tenure, 24, 83, 108, 125
Theis, Karsten, 27, 84, 86
Thousand Oaks, California, 68
Tonge, Peter J., 89
Toronto, Canada, 92

**U**

University of Arizona, 70
University of California, San Diego, 80
University of Illinois, Chicago, 80
University of Massachusetts Amherst, 27, 84
University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 122
University of Vermont, 97
University of Vienna, 107
University of Würzburg, 107, 108

**V**

Van Houten, Bennett, 124
Verdine, Gregory L., 102
Visas, 32, 91, 92, 93, 94
*Vordiplomprüfungen*, 3

**W**

Wellcome Trust, 32
White, Malcolm F., 123
Wolski, Stefanie C., 21, 101
Würzburg, Germany, 9, 16, 17, 36, 61, 111

**X**

Xeroderma Pigmentosum, 101

**Y**

Yale University, 67

**Z**

Zurich, Switzerland, 3, 22, 23