

An International Scientist

If it weren't for the money... science would be pure fun. This is how I see my work, a hobby and a conviction rather than a job. Sure enough, I work long hours and have to perform in a competitive field, but I do not mind. The only activity that is sometimes a "burden" is the responsibility for the people in the laboratory and the pressure of organizing enough money to finance them adequately.

Neither of my parents held an academic grade. However, my father was a software programmer at a time when such people were still a rare breed. I remember the awe I felt when visiting the huge mainframe computers he worked with. My parents made sure that all three of their sons had a good education, and I had all the freedom of choosing what to do, literally at their expense. At a young age, I was interested in astronomy and the space programs. Also, I found the international character of science appealing and, at the same time, very familiar. Growing up in Constance, a mid-sized university town in Germany that is located on the border with Switzerland, I had Austria, Italy, and France close by and enjoyed frequent trips to these and other countries.

I liked science classes at school, but there was no particular inspiration that made me pick biology as a subject at university; I actually thought briefly about studying astronomy or astrophysics. Biology won out because at the University of Constance, it being my home town is just coincidence, biology was not about "plants and animals" but kicked off with lectures and practical courses on physics, chemistry, mathematics, statistics, and a little bit of biology. It was a real mixture of different scientific fields. Only later did the biology courses take a larger part, and even then it was all molecular.

My real scientific inspiration came from Prof. Fritz M. Pohl, who gave spontaneous and slightly chaotic lectures. He presented science in a way that intrigued me, and this feeling deepened during a six-week training course in his laboratory. I stayed on until finishing my PhD.

With Pohl, science was serious and refreshing, hard work, and fun all at the same time. There were only seven people in the group, and we were notorious for sharing a bottle or two of wine nearly every evening. During these sessions, we talked about our own experiments, science at large, funding and politics, our personal lives; in short, basically everything that concerned us, with some emphasis on science. I learned a lot

about real science. Also, research became intermixed with and thus part of my everyday life; this feeling has never left me.

Subsequently, I worked with Hans Lehrach at the then Imperial Cancer Research Fund in London, UK. He was another exponent of great science hiding behind chaotic seminars. We did large-scale research there but similar to what I was used to. I worked independently, but interacted with colleagues and had immediate access to Hans when I needed advice. I was also encouraged to pursue my own ideas and make my scientific mark. Today, I realize how lucky I was. Too many

young scientists are kept under extensive, even envious, control by their supervisors. My supervisor had the caliber, or call it arrogance, to know I could not take anything away from them. Nowadays, I try to be as "arrogant" myself.

While in England, we started a family. I've got two daughters. A family was essential to my professional career because it kept work in perspective; this part of my life has nothing to do with projects, papers, or meetings. Success isn't only an interesting scientific result or publication in a high-ranking journal, it's the smiles on my daughters' faces.

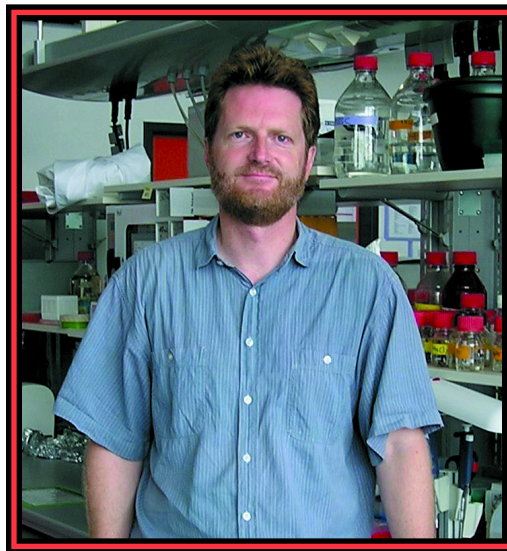
Overall, I'm very satisfied to work at DKFZ (the German Cancer Research Centre) as head of a research division. I have many outstanding colleagues here and in the Heidelberg area.

I considered working in the US before returning to Germany. I had

an offer and didn't feel a particular need to return to Germany. I also would have happily stayed in Britain indefinitely. I opted for a position in Europe because of the truly international nature of this continent. The various cultural backgrounds contribute a lot to science and the overall quality of life. What we lack, still, is continuous funding at a level equivalent to the US and more networking across national borders.

Research in my division could not be done without collaboration. Also on a personal level, interaction is stimulating. I could not do science, at least not at that level, without the other guy.

As told to David Bradley, a science writer based in Cambridge, England (<http://www.sciencebase.com>).



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