

ATVB Named Lecture Reviews—Insight Into Author

ATVB Named Lecture Reviews—2015 Russell Ross Memorial Lecture in Vascular Biology

Insight Into the Author: Klaus Ley, MD, Division of Inflammation Biology, La Jolla Institute for Allergy & Immunology, La Jolla, CA



Why did you choose the profession of scientific investigation?

In high school, I was interested in math and physics. My teachers said I should become a scientist. But I chose medicine. But even while in medical school, I became convinced that I should not be a doctor. So I started a thesis and then did a postdoc right after medical school.

Who have been your role model(s) in your scientific and professional life?

I was quite inspired by Karl Arfors, who taught me that anything was possible, but also by Peter Gaehtgens, who taught me precision in thinking, writing, and experimentation. But my role model became scientists like Rod McEver, scientists with personal and scientific integrity, passion, and relevance.

What have been important influences on your professional life?

Getting my very first R01 accepted. Having the next 5 rejected. Understanding the scarcity of good postdocs. Being encouraged by senior scientists: Irv Weissman wrote a chapter for my first book. And later, being taken seriously by scientists from diverse fields. I am an integrator and I do not believe that fields of scientific endeavor should be staked claims to gold mines.

What are your scientific inspirations?

Finding the truth. Understanding its relevance for people's health. Translating this knowledge.

How have mentors contributed to your professional development?

Karl Arfors believed in me before I did. Kneeling on the floor with Peter Gaehtgens cutting figures, legends, and poster-board to get the poster as close to perfect as possible.

If you knew then what you know now, would you do anything different?

Yes, I would have studied immunology earlier. The immune system is the way to manipulate inflammation, prevent and cure diseases.

What wisdom do you impart on new investigators?

Be patient. If at first you don't succeed, try again. Be unafraid. Invent new methods. Learn from rejection. In science, the truth will prevail; sometimes it takes a while. Know your data. Read. Review papers and grants. Mentor well. Be unselfish. "No good thoughts can die until even better thoughts have germinated from their seeds" (Danish proverb). "The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge" (Daniel Boorstin).

If you were not a scientist, which profession would you pick?

Are there other professions?

Which direction do you envisage your science taking?

More human immunology. More applied. I want to understand the immunology of atherosclerosis and apply this knowledge to build a vaccine for people.

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What are your nonscientific activities?

Hiking, sometimes with ropes. Running every day, sometimes a Half-Marathon. Loving my family.

What sports do you follow?

None.

What are your favorite books, movies, music (pick one or all)?

I keep a long reading list, difficult to pick because different books were important at different times in my life. I think the Bible is one of the most interesting books we have. In movies, I like romantic drama, like "The Longest Ride." I have a long list of movies I want to see, and the list seems to be growing rather than shrinking.

My favorite classical composers are Schubert and Händel. Among pop music, I love Pink Floyd and Queen.

What are your favorite foods and are they heart healthy?

Yes, many are. I love salmon skewers or whole filet. I love scallops, grilled octopus. Among the veggies: Caprese (tomatoes, mozzarella, basil, olive oil), grilled asparagus, grilled anise. Some people say I make good grilled veggies. The recipe is very simple.

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