



BRINGING THE WIKO HOME  
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After completing my formal education, I worked for two years as an intern and resident in pediatrics at Bellevue Hospital, New York City. In 1965, I went to the National Institutes of Health as an officer in the Public Health Service. In 1971, I joined the Department of Physiology at Harvard Medical School; while at Harvard, I began studying the regulation of hormone and neurotransmitter synthesis and secretion. From 1981 to 1986, I served as Head of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine. In 1986, I moved to the University of Chicago, where I was a Professor in the Departments of Pediatrics and Neurobiology, Pharmacology and Physiology, the Committee on Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science, and the College. I retired from the faculty in 2006, and am now Professor Emeritus. Publications: "Why disease persists: An evolutionary nosology." *Med Health Care Philos.* 8, 3 (2005). With A. Weisfeld. "Disparities and discrimination in health care: An introduction." *Perspect Biol Med.* 48 (2005). – Address: Department of Pediatrics, The University of Chicago, 5841 S. Maryland Ave., MC 5058, Chicago II, 60637, USA. E-Mail: r-perlman@uchicago.edu

I first heard about the Wiko when Randy Nesse told me he was organizing a *Schwerpunkt* (whatever that was) on evolutionary medicine and asked if I would be interested in applying for a fellowship and being a member of his group. I had recently retired from the active faculty at the University of Chicago – I like to say that I retired from committee meetings and other administrative responsibilities – and was ready for a new adventure, but I was uncomfortable about the prospect of living in Germany. I talked with my colleague Robert Pippin, a former Fellow and a member of the *Beirat*, who spoke glowingly of the Wiko

and encouraged me to apply. My wife was very supportive of my applying, even though she wouldn't be able to stay in Berlin with me and so my going would entail much longer separations than we had had before. I wish I understood the process by which I was selected, so I could thank all of the people who made my stay at the Wiko possible; I still find the Fellow selection process a little mysterious, which in some ways adds to the atmosphere of the place. Luca Giuliani, Joachim Nettelbeck, and Katharina Biegger helped answer my questions and work out the details of my fellowship. But the people who really took care of the practical issues in getting me and my belongings to Berlin were Andrea Bergmann and Friederike Greul. I came to think of Andrea and Friederike as the "preparing-your-stay" twins. I would write to one and receive an answer from the other; they always seemed to know what each other was thinking and doing.

It was easy to become accustomed to the atmosphere of the Wiko – who wouldn't like to be cared for the way Fellows are cared for – but much more difficult to become comfortable living in Berlin. Between *Gleis 17* on one side and the *Stolpersteine* in front of the Villa Jaffé on the other, it was impossible to avoid almost daily confrontations with evidence of the Nazi era and the Holocaust. For a long time, I felt surrounded by ghosts.

When I applied for my fellowship, I began auditing Introductory German at the University of Chicago. I'm glad I did, because it meant I wasn't an abject beginner when I got to Berlin. I continued to study German at the Wiko under Eva von Kügelgen's patient tutelage. Both Eva and Katarzyna Speder were very supportive of my halting attempts to speak German, and would pretend to understand me even when I couldn't understand myself. I came to the Wiko with the hope of being fluent by the end of the year and was both disappointed and comforted by Eva's early admonition that this was an unrealistic goal. Toward the end of my stay, I had one or two glimpses of what it must feel like to be fluent in German: to my great astonishment, a couple of fully formed and more or less grammatically correct German sentences came out of my mouth. I don't know where they came from but what a thrill it was! I felt like Moses; I got to see the Promised Land, even if I wasn't able to enter it.

Randy was a wonderful leader of our *Schwerpunkt*. He was a tireless cheerleader for evolutionary medicine, and he created a climate of good feeling and mutual respect in which we felt free to express our views and to disagree with one another. I often found myself in the minority. Evolutionary medicine is an interdisciplinary field that can thrive only in an environment in which evolutionists and physicians work together and value each other's perspectives and contributions. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of jealousy and hostility

between the two groups. It often fell on me to represent or defend the viewpoint of physicians. I was especially concerned about our use of language, because our language will affect the reception of our ideas and the fate of the field. I had to remind my colleagues that the prestigious medical society in the United Kingdom is the Royal College of Physicians, not the Royal College of Clinicians, Medics, or Docs. I am interested in the cooperative or harmonious interactions that enable smaller units of biological organization to form larger and more complex structures (genes and gene products interact to form cells, cells interact to form organisms, organisms interact to form groups), while the other members of the *Schwerpunkt* tended to focus on competitive interactions between organisms or genomes. I sometimes thought the others were unduly reductionistic, while they seemed to think I was hopelessly naive and fuzzy-thinking and afraid to face the realities of the evolutionary process. But we liked and respected each other and after a while our disagreements felt like family quarrels; I learned a lot from them and hope they learned something from me. I was especially pleased to meet and work with Carl Bergstrom and Mark Thomas, who are a generation younger than I. One of my colleagues at the University of Chicago describes his field as one in which parents eat their children. Fortunately, evolutionary medicine is not like that: as long as we can attract outstanding young scientists like Carl and Mark into evolutionary medicine, the future of the field is bright.

I gave my colloquium early in the autumn, not by choice but because by the time I signed up, all of the later dates were taken. I presented an evolutionary approach to understanding socioeconomic inequalities in health. I argued that socioeconomic inequalities can be understood as inequalities in rates of aging, and that an evolutionary theory of aging could help elucidate these inequalities. This was a subject I hadn't yet done much work on, and I had a few weeks of anxiety as I rushed to prepare a talk I wouldn't be embarrassed by, but it worked out well, because the ensuing discussions were most helpful in clarifying my thinking. Socioeconomic disparities in health remain a major problem in the United States and other developed countries, and have been refractory to conventional medical interventions. If an evolutionary perspective can inspire interventions that reduce these disparities, it will be a major contribution of this new field.

At a reception at the Wiko soon after I arrived, I met Paul Unschuld, a former Fellow who is now director of an institute on Chinese life sciences at the Charité. Paul and I had known of each other but I doubt we would have met if it weren't for this reception and our Wiko connection. Paul and his wife Ulrike were exceptionally kind and generous to me, inviting me to their home and introducing me to a number of physicians and scientists

I would otherwise not have had an opportunity to meet. Getting to know the Unschulds and their friends greatly enriched my experience in Berlin.

I run regularly in Chicago and was looking forward to running in Berlin. The Grunewald was a beautiful place to run – different from, but just as lovely, as my route along Lake Michigan at home. The first couple of times I ran in the Grunewald, I got hopelessly lost and had to rely on the kindness of strangers to get home. Fortunately, people were very helpful. I began to understand why forests play such an important role in Grimm’s Fairy Tales. I did finally get to know a couple of routes that I could run with confidence. But what really made running enjoyable was running with Felicitas (Fe) Hentschke and Catriona MacCallum. (Is Fe the only person at the Wiko with a nickname?) Fe was a tireless and enthusiastic runner who seemed to know all of the paths in the Grunewald. I looked forward to our weekly runs and conversations, and learned much about German politics and culture from her. One morning when I was running with Catriona, we came across some wild boar. They looked a little scary but I comforted myself with the realization that I didn’t have to run faster than the boar – I only had to run faster than Catriona. Despite my interest in cooperative or altruistic behaviors, I do understand the evolutionary importance of competitions between individuals.

2007–2008 was an awkward time for Americans to be in Europe. At times, I wish I had a sign “Don’t blame me – I voted for Gore and Kerry.” Especially during the primary season, there was a lot of discussion among the Fellows and staff about American politics. Fortunately, although almost everyone I talked with was distressed by our government, their distress did not extend to the American people. I was embarrassed by the terribly jejune level of political discourse in the United States. Americans are killing and being killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, people are losing their homes and their jobs, racial inequalities and tensions remain great, and our country is drifting, leaderless, but the issues many people seem most worried about are the legalization of gay marriage and whether Barack Obama wears an American flag pin in his lapel. I kept thinking of the words of Thomas Jefferson, “Indeed I tremble for my country ...” Perhaps it was just as well that I couldn’t follow German political discussions in newspapers or on the radio, so I could maintain the belief, or fantasy, that they were carried out on a higher level.

Perhaps the best way to describe the Wiko is to say that it functions the way we hoped universities would be when we entered the academy – but of course real universities aren’t that way. The administration gave us the feeling that what we were doing was interesting and worthwhile, and that they would like to help us be as productive in pursuing our work

as possible. The administration must work hard to maintain funding, but they take all of that responsibility themselves and don't pass it off on the Fellows. In all the time I was at the Wiko, I never once heard the terms "indirect costs" or "salary recovery". What a pleasure to devote oneself to one's work without worrying about finances! The atmosphere at the Wiko promoted interdisciplinary interactions in a way that universities don't. Of course I know humanists and social scientists at home, but I know them largely because we have served on committees together; I don't go to their seminars and they don't come to mine. (And now that I'm retired from committee meetings, I may never again meet people in other disciplines.) It was exciting to break down the "two cultures" barrier and try our best to engage with what Fellows in other disciplines were thinking and writing about. I learned an incredible amount from the Tuesday colloquia, the lunches that followed the colloquia, and all of the other interactions I had with my colleagues. I was surprised by what seemed to be a little "science phobia" or at least "science anxiety" on the part of some of the humanists, but that seemed to dissipate as the year went on.

I understand that each year's *Jahrgang* has its own special character. I don't have anything to compare it with, but I thought our *Jahrgang* was wonderful. I don't know how much the administration does to create such a well-functioning group, or if they just invite a bunch of interesting people and leave the rest to chance; however the process works, it certainly worked well this year. For me, the cultural diversity among the Fellows was even more valuable than the disciplinary diversity. Dhruv Raina opened my eyes to this cultural diversity and helped me realize how sheltered and insular my life has been. I can't begin to mention all of the people who made this year so precious; all I can say is that I feel bonded to virtually everyone and feel privileged to have been a member of our group.

Having decided to come to the Wiko, I felt that being in Berlin was a rare opportunity to open myself to a people and a culture from which I had felt estranged. Studying German was one part of this process. Learning about German wine (aided by an enjoyable wine-tasting evening that Christine Klöhn arranged) was another. Gesine Bottomley was wonderful about recommending and discussing German literature (in English) and German restaurants with me. And Vera Schulze-Seeger was extraordinarily patient and good-natured in teaching me how to get around Berlin, in getting theater and opera tickets for me, and in answering my endless questions. But the most rewarding experience was talking with, getting to know, and becoming friends with so many, many people. Overcoming some of my own prejudices was one of the most valuable extracurricular benefits of being at the Wiko.

My one regret about my fellowship was that my wife, who is a practicing psychoanalyst, could not stay in Berlin with me. We decided that six months was as long as we would be comfortable with an intercontinental marriage. I was sorry to leave the Wiko at the end of March but consoled myself with the thought that the challenge was to “bring the Wiko home”, to maintain as much as I can of the sense of affirmation, the intellectual stimulation, and the social interactions that the Wiko provided. I only wish I understood the Fellow selection process better, because if McCain becomes President, I’d like to become a Permanent Fellow.

Does the Wiko offer political asylum as well as academic sanctuary?