

Ponzy Lu, Chemistry, Blacker

Before Caltech: In October of 1942 I was born in Shanghai followed by a boat trip to San Francisco in February/March of 1949. Primary and secondary education was in Shanghai, Los Angeles, Glendale (CA) and (another boat trip) London (UK). After Lower 6th Form in London, our family flew back from Copenhagen in a DC7C (cheaper than the surcharge for DC8 or 707) to Los Angeles with stops in Greenland and Canada.

Caltech: My memories of Caltech were not different than most descriptions of our classmates, overlaid with the fog of academic struggle—today it is called post traumatic stress..

Transition to Post Caltech: My lab work in the James Bonner group with Paul Ts'o (Caltech PhD, 1955) resulted in two publications in PNAS. Back then it was a pseudo vanity publication since all one needed was to go down the hall at Caltech ask a NAS member to submit it, often without peer review. Ts'o got a job as full Professor at Johns Hopkins University (he was a postdoc, and subsequently Senior Research Fellow with Bonner for 8 years). I was also tasked with ordering every thing he needed to set up a biophysics research group at Johns Hopkins. This resulted in my going to Baltimore in summer of 1963 after my Junior year to check that everything ordered arrived and instrumentation installed, including a Beckman (Spinco) Model E. The experience made starting my job at UPenn a piece of cake.

Before returning for Senior year at Caltech, I visited possible graduate schools. Matt Meselson (Caltech PhD 1957) of Harvard Biology told me that a C student from Caltech was as good as A students from anywhere else. (He had a couple of Caltech grads in his research group at that time and they said to check out MIT in spite of my prejudice against another Institute of Technology.)

Career advice from Caltech faculty started with Frosh Camp. Do I recall correctly that the first official words were from Dean Foster Strong: "The seduction is over and the rape has begun?" DuBridge was the second speaker, starting with "look to your left and right—only one of you will graduate in 1964." Other comments from faculty were more inviting. Then Norman Davidson told us not to bother the faculty too much since they were busy. He also told me when I did not do well in his Physical Chemistry course that I was headed to molecular biology. His advice a year later on choosing graduate schools was that I should not go to Harvard since we already knew that Jack Beauchamp, Dick Burgess, George Reeke and Bill Stwalley among others were better than me. I was some what placated when I learned a decade later that he gave Mike Roshbash (Caltech 1965, Nobel Prize 2017) similar advice—we both went from Caltech Chemistry to MIT Biology.

Post Caltech: I did a PhD in Biophysics with Alex Rich, a former graduate student of L. Pauling. MIT by contrast was really a technological institute. They used Social Security numbers in place

of names; all buildings were referred to by numbers although there were signs and engravings using the Latin alphabet with names on them; and all course programs were referred to by numbers in chronological order of founding. Biology is Course 7, Chemistry is course 5, physics is course 8—EE is course 6, i.e. they had electrical engineering before physics. I did a postdoctoral stint of 3 years with time spent in Göttingen and Köln Germany as well as Geneva Switzerland.

Career: I joined the University of Pennsylvania Chemistry Department in 1973 where I did the usual stuff until 2021 (48 years). Because of COVID the University choose to reduce its tenure obligations by offering 2 years pay if one retired in 2021—I took the bribe.

In early 2000's I reconnected with Caltech by being on the Caltech Alumni Association Board for about 7 years. During that time the Sundial in front of the Student Center on campus was planned. First shadow was in 2008.

Family: Donald Voet, (Caltech 1960) joined the UPenn Chemistry faculty around 1968, and knew me from overlapping as a postdoc with Alex Rich at MIT when I was a graduate student. He called me during my postdoc in Germany and asked me if I could interview for a faculty slot. Minor detail was that UPenn only reimburses \$200. for travel. I went to a travel agent, a Heidi Fahl, in Göttingen with my dollar limitation. She showed me how to fill out a form to get a student discount by flying through Brussels, Belgium. Total with a stop at JFK was \$178. I took her out to lunch as a thank you, and she eventually moved to Philadelphia with me in 1973 when I started at UPenn. We married in January 1975, and our daughter Kristina was born at the end of October 1975. Otherwise, the big family event was in 1995 when Kristina and I joined David Eisenberg (Caltech postdoc with Dickerson in the late 1960's) and his daughter, Mike Kuehl (NIH) and his daughter in a "Father Daughter Ride Across America" on bicycles (non electric). We left on Mother's day from the pier in Santa Monica and arrived on Father's Day at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.

Current: Every day Heidi and I plan to move to a smaller house/condo in about 5 years. We are doing catch up delayed house maintenance and practice "The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning."