

Awards and Citations

Response by Caroline Strömberg for the presentation of the 2017 Schuchert Award of the Paleontological Society



Caroline Strömberg

Thank you, Scott for your kinds words and thank you to the Society. I am very honored to receive this award, and like some of the previous awardees, rather uncomfortable accepting it. This is not only because I'm Swedish and Swedes do not easily handle compliments, but more importantly considering the Intellectual Giants who have preceded me on the list, and the many amazing scientists who are not on it. That said, I am excited to be the first Schuchert awardee under the new award criteria, which relax the age restrictions and permit researchers with a less than straight career path to be considered. I think that this change will allow a diverse set of paleontologists to receive recognition, which I hope will help inspire new, diverse generations of scientists to pursue our field.

I did not know that I wanted to be a paleobotanist until I became one. I wasn't even sure I wanted to be a scientist. Certainly, I was a regular dinosaur- and mammal-crazy kid, but I was equally crazy about doing art. So, when I was in my early twenties I dabbled in both. I went to preparatory art school, worked in a scientific illustration studio, and drew comics (that was my dream!), but I also started an undergraduate geology/biology program at Gothenburg University (Sweden). I was fundamentally torn. Until one point. Namely when I fortuitously got a scholarship to spend a year at UC Berkeley. I went there thinking that it would merely be a chance to spend time abroad while taking some cool classes in vertebrate paleontology (I was still a dinosaur girl at heart). But instead I fell in love—with Berkeley. The classes I took opened my eyes to paleontology

not simply as a descriptive science or a tool in stratigraphy, but as an exciting way to learn about the fundamental processes that have shaped—and still shape—organisms and ecosystems. And in a seminar on macroevolution co-led by Kevin Padian and Nan Arens (who would later become my first advisor) I realized that the key to understanding the terrestrial realm—including vertebrates—is to understand plants. Finally, I knew what I wanted to do: study the role of plants in ecosystem evolution. So, I went back to Sweden, did a quick Master's Thesis on conodonts from Gotland, got a Fulbright Scholarship and returned to Berkeley for some serious paleobotany!

At this point I need to start thanking people, or we're never going to get through this. It's hard to select just a few among the myriad of folks who helped shape my path, but I will try. My MVP (most valuable player) no doubt is my mother, Essie Andersson. Raising me largely by herself while a medical student, she showed me that you can do almost anything as long as you've got passion and perseverance. Plus, she loved taking me to natural history museums. I'm also indebted to my quirky high school biology teacher, the late Anders Björse, who taught me about hypothesis testing and got me hooked on geology through field explorations in the Phanerozoic of Scania.

Many people helped and inspired me during graduate school at UC Berkeley. Kevin Padian, Bill Clemens, and other faculty encouraged me to apply to graduate school there and have remained supportive. Steven Stanley, who visited Berkeley to give a seminar about C₄ grasses and hypsodonty, which made me start puzzling over grassland evolution as a dissertation topic. My first advisor, Nan Arens, who let me pursue my hare-brained ideas about ancient grasslands, starting with an eight-week field collecting spree across the U.S. on a mere hunch that Cenozoic sediments *should* preserve phytoliths. She did this despite warnings from colleagues that my project was doomed to fail. I don't know if she trusted me or if she was just tired of my stubborn insistence but, either way, I am thankful that she let me find my own way. David Lindberg, who graciously took me into his lab when Nan took a position in New York State and I became an academic orphan. More than anyone, he trained me in how to navigate academia as a professional. The late Don Kaplan, a plant morphologist extraordinaire, who taught me how to speak plant and love plants. Before Kaplan, I was merely plant-curious—afterwards, I was a plant convert. Pat Holroyd and Diane Erwin, UCMP collections goddesses, who not only dished out excellent scientific advice, but also provided solace to a steady stream of confused or frustrated graduate students.

Numerous people outside of UC Berkeley helped me get started by giving me access to their field sites, donating samples, or sharing their expertise. Among them are Bob Hunt, Dick Tedford, Gary Morgan, Mike O'Neill, Emmett Evanoff, Russ Graham, Tony Barnosky, Debbie Hanneman, Alan Tabrum, Bruce McFadden, Joe Thomasson, and Dolores Piperno. I especially thank Hannan and Leigh Anne LaGarry, who did geologic mapping in Nebraska when I came cruising through in my Isuzu Trooper in search of Cenozoic sediment. They took me into their home and taught me everything there is to know about Great Plains stratigraphy (which is riveting stuff indeed).

I owe thanks to my postdoctoral mentors, who believed in me enough to take me on: Lars Werdelin and Else Marie Friis at the Swedish Museum of Natural History, and Scott Wing and Kay Behrensmeyer at the Smithsonian. In particular, thank you Scott for teaching me about leaves. I had some of my most enjoyable and educative science moments quibbling with you and the late Leo Hickey over Cretaceous leaf morphotypes—and I heard some of the worst puns. I thank my scientific family, namely my lab and my collaborators and colleagues, for all the fun times doing research together, and the Burke Museum for

being my home. My scientific heroes in the field, Else Marie Friis, Kay Behrensmeyer, Bonnie Jacobs, Christine Janis, and of course Estella Leopold should not go unmentioned. These bold, brilliant, non-conforming scientists have helped pave the way for younger generations of women paleontologists.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My husband and partner in crime since graduate school at UC Berkeley, Greg Wilson. He is a superb researcher who I love talking endless shop with, and he has been my rock in life's ups and downs, supplying both comic relief and numerous useful sports metaphors that I have slowly, begrudgingly learned to appreciate. Our two children, Freddy and Ilse, without whom science would be less fun, and I would be less inspired. They remind me that scientists are just grownups that manage to maintain a childlike curiosity into adulthood, and they help me rediscover that same joy I felt when I found my very first fossil. Thank you all.

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