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My science journey started with family camping trips across the US and Canada. We were fortunate to have the time to spend outdoors, and this stimulated my interest in the natural sciences and environment. I was also lucky to have an incredibly talented 7th grade biology teacher. I still remember being amazed at the beauty of Mendelian genetics and looking down a microscope for the first time to watch an amoeba’s movements. During high school, my interests were diverse so my path as a scientist was not direct, nor was it determined at a young age. I was very lucky – my parents believed in the value of a great education, which opened many doors for me and set me on my career path as a scientist.

I went to Carleton College, a small liberal arts college in Northfield, Minnesota. I selected a Biology major and learned at Carleton that I enjoyed doing research. After graduating, I worked for 2 years as a research technician at the University of Chicago to gain additional experience before starting graduate school. I was accepted to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where I performed my PhD dissertation research on heat shock gene transcription. I was interested in working on problems applicable to human disease, and I was very fortunate to be offered a postdoctoral position at the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the Whitehead, I began researching signaling mechanisms that regulate blood and immune cell development, the topic that my own laboratory at MD Anderson still focuses on, one that we hope will help us better understand and treat diseases such as leukemia and autoimmunity.

FAQ:

What is your favorite aspect of your job?
The freedom to explore complex biological questions, the thrill of thinking you might be the first person to discover a new process, and the ability to work with other incredibly dynamic, smart and fun people.

What is your least favorite aspect of your job?
Every job has mundane parts that just need to get done. For me, the paperwork and administrative details can sometimes be annoying and (worse) boring. It’s important to power through and focus on the good!

How long does it take to get to where you are?
Four years of college, 2 as a technician, 5 in grad school and 5 as a postdoc (including a maternity leave). The length of time isn’t a problem when it is all so interesting.

What would you like to do in the future?
Make great and meaningful discoveries, and ensure that everyone in my lab has the career options that lead them in the path that is right for them.

How much money could you make in this career?
The sky is the limit! While many scientists don’t pursue their careers simply to make money, there are plenty of ways to increase or supplement income. The only limitation is imagination.

Can I contact you with more questions about your career decisions?
Yes!