

**1996**

**Katherine Wilson**

Kathy Wilson grew up in Tacoma, Washington, and attended the University of Washington. She started as a geophysics major, influenced by her stepfather who was a polar ice geophysicist, but decided to pursue a research career after her mother became terminally ill. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1979 with a degree in Microbiology.

Wilson pursued her Ph.D. at the University of California at San Francisco, where she studied under Ira Herskowitz. UCSF stood out as a place with "dazzlingly high creative energy, lots of interesting labs, and grad students and professors who loved it there." She was the school's first Ph.D. in Genetics, graduating in 1985. At the time she was doing yeast genetics, and she felt that cell biology was a "little odd" and complicated, but interesting, so she changed fields to cell biology for her postdoctoral work. Wilson's postdoctoral training was in John Newport's lab at the University of California at San Diego, where she worked on frog egg extracts as a way to study nuclear envelope formation. She moved to the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins in 1989.

Now an Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins, Wilson's lab is studying nuclear envelope assembly and disassembly in vitro using extracts from the eggs of the frog, *Xenopus laevis*. Their studies focus on nuclear membrane dynamics, hoping to answer such questions as how the nuclear envelope disassembles into small vesicles at mitosis. They are also examining the mechanisms of (i.e., which proteins mediate) nuclear vesicle targeting to chromatin, and vesicle recognition and fusion to reform the enclosed nucleus.

Wilson also enjoys teaching and describes herself in that venue as "a bit of a ham." She taught the Physiology course at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole in 1989, 1991, and 1992. She describes Woods Hole as a scientist's chance "to play in the sandbox" and work with really motivated students.

A member of the ASCB since 1988, Wilson has served as an active member of the ASCB Public Information Committee since 1990. Bob Goldman, Chair of the Public Information Committee, recruited her to the Committee when she was teaching at Woods Hole. Wilson had offered Goldman some unsolicited opinions on how the public should be more aware of how valuable science is to people's lives, and how frustrating it can be that few people were genuinely aware of how science actually works. Goldman responded that she had just articulated the purpose of the ASCB Public Information Committee, and asked her to join. She was in the early stages of her career and she said "'yes' because I had not yet learned how to say 'no'."

Years later, Wilson acknowledges getting satisfaction from her naive commitment. Wilson's main contribution to the Committee is on the Press Book, which the Committee has published and distributed for the past four years. The Committee, with the help of ASCB members who program abstracts for the Annual Meeting, select about fifteen abstracts for highlighting as press releases just before the Annual Meeting. The

Committee works with the authors to transform their scientific abstracts into user-friendly press releases for the general public.

The ASCB press Book is a significant undertaking but seems to be paying off. Wilson is particularly pleased that the 1995 book saw a tremendous increase in the number of releases picked up, written into articles, and placed in newspapers around the country. Wilson now sees her words appear in newspaper articles, from Bozeman to Youngstown, about interesting research findings in cell biology. She feels her contribution to public awareness and appreciation of science is gratifying and worthwhile, and hopes that others will join in, especially as the Committee considers expanding its long-term approach to science education to include electronic (TV, radio) media.

Wilson believes that public efforts are key to motivating support for biomedical research funding in Congress, and that every scientist has a responsibility to promote science. This could include such varied activities as visiting local schools and giving talks to young people, or submitting letters to the editor of local newspapers. She has visited the junior high and senior high schools she attended in Tacoma, and the Kamehameha School in Honolulu, where her sister is a student. Wilson says that while her activity on the Public Information Committee "is a bit of work," there's also something in it for her directly: writing the ASCB Press Book, she has learned how to write op/ed-style, an unexpectedly useful skill.

Wilson has developed an eclectic mix of interesting pastimes. A product of the Puget Sound, she likes to prepare her own smoked salmon. She looks forward to occasionally receiving shipments of salmon from one of her brothers who is a salmon fisherman. When inspired, she occasionally makes seminole patchwork wallhangings out of raw silk, undoubtedly an influence from her mother, a textile artist, and her father, an architect. Wilson likes to hike as frequently as possible and also plays a competitive game of volleyball. She developed a taste for opera (Tosca is her favorite) while in high school and has season tickets for "all three" performances in Baltimore, and also makes trips to Washington, D.C., as well as to New York for performances at the Met. Her inquiring scientific nature also contributes to another form of prospecting and fun: gold panning in northern California. This aspiring 49er has no plans to quit her day job, however, as she has found more profit in her lab.