

Clinical Research Training Program Fellow 2008-2009
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID),
National Institutes of Health (NIH)
4th Year Medical Student, Georgetown University School of Medicine
B.S.-Major: Biology, Minor: Chemistry, University of New Mexico
B.S.-Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

My name is Camille Puronen. At the age of 18 I fled the rough streets of suburban St. Louis for the bustling metropolis of Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. Despite having spent most of my formative years planning to study biology, a David Bowie song convinced me mid-way through college applications that I ought to study architecture. About a semester in, I began to suspect my mistake, but dangling at the end of sophomore year was the prospect of spending a year in Paris sketching museums and parks and eating pain viennoise for breakfast every day, so I hunkered down over my drafting board and completed my degree.

After a brief stint in a Chicago firm, I packed up my car and drove to New Mexico to study biology, mountains, and green chile. I subsequently took a position in clinical research in Boston, during which time I read some books by Paul Farmer and filled out some forms that eventually landed me at Georgetown University School of Medicine. It was at Georgetown that I learned about the Clinical Research Training Program (CRTP) from a fellow Georgetown student name Nick Liu. I had always been interested in HIV (even prior to reading Paul Farmer) but had never participated in HIV research. I realized that the CRTP was the perfect opportunity, and upon arriving at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) I finagled my way to the Clinical and Molecular Retrovirology Section of the Laboratory of Immunoregulation, under the mentorship of the brilliant, dedicated and lovely Dr. Irini Sereti. In achieving this, I reflect, I must have burned through a large chunk of good karma, but it was probably worth it.

While at the NIH I conducted bench research in HIV immunobiology, specifically markers of HIV disease progression, and analyzed cellular response to IL-7 in HIV disease and idiopathic CD4 lymphopenia. I presented my findings at the annual Keystone Symposium on HIV immunobiology and co-authored a review of the pathogenesis of chronic HIV infection. I also had the opportunity to take a brief trip to Kenya to work with patients in an NIH-sponsored clinical HIV study.

CRTP was truly a life-changing year for me. This enthusiastically wayward career dilettante discovered a whole new world of medicine, where everyone enjoyed thinking, mentors were dedicated to your success, role models abounded, and the future of medicine was being untangled and argued over and laid out in tables and diagrams and graphs. My image of my future career, which had always been romantically hazy and dotted with carefully maintained forks and exits, began to straighten and clarify.

CRTP solidified my interest in a career in clinical research. After completing a residency in internal medicine, I hope to return to the NIH for fellowship training. My areas of interest continue to be the immunobiology of HIV and the epidemiology and public health of infectious diseases.

When I'm not working or staring at my laptop, I can be found running in 5 kilometer circles, assembling fantastic mix bowls from the hot bar at Whole Foods, reading the online version of the New York Times, and watching Iron Chef with my boyfriend.