Hedi Rudloff, an Extraordinary Life

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This is the story of Hedi, my faithful companion of more than 60 years. It is the story of family adventures around the world. We had met in the early fifties at the University of Heidelberg where she learned the skills of a physical therapist while I was struggling through the rigors of chemistry.

In the fall of 1958, she moved to live with her sister in Chicago where she joined Illinois Masonic Hospital after she had passed again some PT exams while I stayed behind to finish my diploma in Heidelberg.

In August of 1959, I was ready to chase after her. I had already an immigration visa in my hands when a strange incident happened. Hedi had secured a teaching assistantship for me at IIT and I had booked a flight on an airplane, I vaguely remember that it was a DC3 organized by American students on a vacation in Europe. However, a funny thing happened to me on my way to Frankfurt Airport: Upon arrival at the ticket counter I learned that without an American passport, I was not allowed to fly with the students.

After I recalled my brother who had already driven home, I landed back with my parents. Days later, I secured a cabin at the HMS Maasdam from Rotterdam to New York and from there to Detroit and by bus to Chicago. To the chagrin of President Retalliata, I arrived late for classes at the end of September.

Not to forget, there is another crazy story within our story. On our arrival at the airline terminal in the center of New York City, I discovered that I had left my airline ticket to Detroit on the ship. Here I was with hardly ten bucks in my pocket stranded in a strange town. I wandered around during the night staring skyward at the Empire State Building. As good fortune had it, a gracious travel companion from the ship lent me some money for a ticket to Detroit where I briefly stayed overnight to take the bus to Chicago the next day.

What a beginning of my professional career at IIT! We stayed two years with Hedi's sister before we moved to Gunsaulus Hall at IIT. The rent was then still affordable as compared to today's prices. And that's where Hedi's story begins.

Hedi had been offered a position at Jackson Park Hospital on Stony Island where she created from scratch a PT department under the guidance of Dr. Maynard Shapiro. Every morning she drove with a beaten-up Rambler station wagon to the hospital while I was struggling with my coursework. Although I had nine years of English in high school where grammar was emphasized, I could hardly speak it. I gradually learned it in communication with my lab students.

As fortune had it, Hedi had our first son, Uwe Kai. She had been working until the last minute, when Dr. Shapiro had her brought to the delivery room. It was a lengthy affair because she insisted on a natural birth. While I was sitting in the waiting room counting the minutes and hours and working on a complex differential equation for my thesis, Dr. Shapiro archived the birth with our 16 mm movie camera. Unfortunately, the Chicago health officials did not allow at that time for the husband to be in the delivery room. It was August 1962.

While laboring over my Ph.D. thesis—Uwe as usual had his head on my lap as I was clacking away on my typewriter—I vividly remember Walter Cronkite announcing that President Kennedy had been shot. It was November 22, 1963. For days I was unable to work on my thesis. In December 1964 Elke Ina was born after the same delivery routine at Jackson Park Hospital. Hedi came home the next days with Elke wearing a red Santa Claus hat. We had another traditional German Christmas Eve at Carman Hall under candle light with “O Tannenbaum” and other Christmas carols.

In the meantime, I had been accepted as Research Scientist at IIT Research Institute. Finally, thanks to Hedi’s patience and unwavering loyalty, I graduated in January 1965.

After graduation in January of 1965, I worked with Dr. Ely Freeman investigating the catalytic effect with metal oxides on chemical reactions as my Ph.D. thesis had dealt with surface phenomena.

Every weekday morning Hedi faithfully drove to Jackson Park Hospital and in May 1966 she delivered our third child, Kai Sven. When Kai was 6 weeks old, we drove all the way to Colorado where I took part in the Mountain Soaring Expedition. We camped out in beautiful Moraine Valley. While I was instructing my students how to fly
sailplanes over the mountains, Hedi took care of the three children as they played with the chipmunks.

As the years went by, Hedi dropped the kids off at the Lab School of the University of Chicago on her way to the hospital. When school was over the children walked to their friends' house to stay until Hedi could pick them up coming home. While Uwe was driving us to my 50th anniversary at IIT, he went down memory lane showing me all the places that he remembered from his school days. There is memory of our children in the front yard of Carman Hall playing with their friends. When I returned from work, Uwe called out “Pappi,” which sounded like “puppy” in German. Uwe’s little friend from India said, “He calls you puppy; my dad calls me chicken”! It made us realize that phonetics in foreign languages can be a tricky misunderstanding.

1967, the Chicago snowstorm! Traffic was stranded for days, busses crosswise blocking the streets. Lucky me, living just across the street from IITRI, I had to stagger through the knee-high snow to my work taking care of our experiments. Hedi drove in snail's tempo to the hospital and took care of her patients.

There is the memory of my office literally on top of IITRI’s research nuclear reactor. I looked through the window down to the reactor without thinking of the danger of radiation. We had many projects that were sponsored by the government and other agencies.

I had experimented with Mössbauer Spectroscopy in gas adsorption studies¹, when Caroline Herzenberg² had secured a sample of the first moonrocks brought back by Neil Armstrong. Such nuclear spectroscopy permitted to study the iron content of the rocks. Unfortunately, the rocks had to be returned to NASA; meaning, no souvenir for us!

It is a curious fact that Rudolf Mössbauer³ was a student in physics at the University of Heidelberg while I was studying chemistry. Mössbauer received the Nobel Prize for his discovery of Recoilless Nuclear Resonance Absorption based essentially on his Ph.D. thesis at Heidelberg.

In 1989, I assisted Dr. E. L. Grove at IITRI to organize the 8th Developments in Applied Spectroscopy. My contribution was another paper on Mössbauer Spectroscopy⁴.

Mentioning Neil Armstrong I remember that we met him at the world soaring championship 1970 in Marfa, Texas, where Uwe coaxed an autograph from Neil who was an accomplished glider pilot; after all, returning from outer space is always a gliding affair.

But then, this should be the story of Hedi. Whenever we had a chance, I tried to combine our research efforts with my second professional ambition as a pilot and flight instructor. In the summer of 1972, I was invited to take part in the National Hail Research Experiment (NHRE) in Boulder, Colorado. We were flying in and around developing thunderstorms. NHRE was a cooperative effort between several American Universities, The National Center for Atmospheric Research, and NOAA. The result was another publication on the Atmospheric Electric Field⁵.

Hedi and the kids joined me for a few weeks. They visited old friends from IITRI who had moved to Colorado. Uwe is still in contact with Kevin Andresen whose father had been working at IITRI for many years.

In 1977 I was invited by Vice Rector Al-Gwaiz to join the faculty of the University of Petroleum and Minerals (UPM) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Hedi and the children followed a few weeks later. As it happened, Hedi followed again her professional calling and created another PT department from scratch.

She was one of the very few women who was allowed to work in the country. Since, as is still today, women were not permitted to drive a car, I brought her every morning to Fakhri Hospital and picked her up again in the evening.

I well remember Dr. Russell Edwards who taught us statistical mechanics during our years at IIT. He was an excellent instructor. What sticks out in my memory is a

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2 Her illustrious career is well documented in: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caroline_Herzenberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caroline_Herzenberg)
discussion that I had with him about flying airplanes and sailplanes. As a World War II veteran he had flown missions over Germany flying a P38 Fighter Plane. As we compared notes we discovered that he may have been dispensing his ammunition on us kids as we were running across the meadows.

The world is a global village. This comes to mind as I remember some strange coincidences: UPM was always in need of additional faculty. As I was in charge of the hiring committee in chemistry, I stumbled upon an application of my favorite teacher at IIT. Dr. Russell Edwards had at that time an interesting professional career. After having left Argonne National Laboratory as a chemical engineer, he had gone to Algeria where he eventually was a dean at some new university. He was ready for a change and wanted to come to us at UPM.

I vaguely remember that Dr. E. L. Grove of IITRI at one time had considered coming to Dhahran.

We stayed in Saudi Arabia for seven years before we returned to Indiana. Hedi joined the PT Department of The Methodist Hospitals while I began my last professional career at Governors State University in Illinois. For a few years, I was a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. As our monthly meetings rotated between the various Illinois colleges, we visited IIT where I saw Peter Lykos for the last time. I was always interested in quantum chemistry but I missed joining him as my advisor.

As fate had it, Hedi suffered a severe brain aneurism that afforded surgery. It was Christmas 1990. After three months in the hospital, she came home for a month. She weaned herself off the seizure medicine and began working again. Initially, she was unable to drive on account of partial paralysis.

We had developed a routine whereby I brought her to work, went briefly back home, picked her up for graduate classes at IU in Gary while I continued to GSU for my evening lectures. As I left my classes, I drove back to IU where Hedi was waiting patiently to come home with me.

Eventually, Hedi was able to drive her car again, still handicapped with her left side partially paralyzed. For many years, she commuted between the campuses of The Methodist Hospital and graduate school that she finally finished with honors and an M.S. Degree in Hospital Administration.

Hedi was a professional of high standards. To quote Dr. Shapiro, “she is the best PT in Chicago.” She was always eager to expand her professional horizon. A recent review of her library indicates that she always strove to gain new insight into new approaches and recent advances in physical therapy, in particular, and health matters, in general. On our lecture trip to Warsaw, Poland, in 1968, she visited a nearby clinic where advanced research took place behind the Iron Curtain.

In 2003, she suffered again a brain aneurism as she tried to lift up one of our twin grandchildren. After again several months at Evanston Hospital, she came home. She had a few more hospital stays with temporary recovery. Currently, her physical condition has slowly deteriorated. We consider ourselves lucky that she is still around.

Over the years, she never lost her positive attitude towards life. She affords daily assistance that we provide her with optimism. We men often do not appreciate what it means for our women to work in their profession, attending school for a higher degree and taking care of the family; and that with cheerfulness.

As Uwe and I attended my 50th graduation ceremony at IIT, we reminisced about Hedi and her overwhelming contribution to our lives. It is she who made all our professional and extracurricular successes possible.

This ends the story of Hedi.