

The Patterson Award for a lucky crystallographer

Zbigniew Dauter¹

¹National Cancer Institute, MCL, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, USA

My activity as a crystallographer has been marked by significant involvement of good fortune. The first lucky event was the timely establishment of a small crystallographic unit at the University in Gdansk, Poland, allowing me to learn and get some experience in small-molecule crystallography, leading to obtaining a PhD working on crystal structures of the anti-tumor derivatives of acridine. Together with other Polish adepts of crystallography of my age we were fortunate to attend schools and workshops regularly organized in our country and learned from such invited lecturers as Nikolay Below, Dorothy Hodgkin, Jerome Karle, Herbert Hauptman, and many others. The participation in the Erice School in 1978 led to my postdoc position in York (England) with Michael Woolfson. After a year I moved in York to the group of Eleanor and Guy Dodson and switched from small structures to proteins. It was another luck, when Keith Wilson invited me to the synchrotron outstation of EMBL in Hamburg, where I spent ten happy years among truly international milieu, specializing in using synchrotron radiation for anomalous phasing, atomic resolution work etc. After a short stay back in York, in 1997 I received a phone call from Alex Wlodawer, which eventually resulted in my moving to Brookhaven, as a “synchrotron representative” of the consortium of NIH crystallographers, from where in 2004 I moved to Argonne in the same capacity. Throughout all these years I always claimed that I was very fortunate to do what I liked most, that is collaborating with many friends on analyzing macromolecular crystal structures, developing new tools and applying anomalous diffraction for phasing, as well as spreading crystallographic knowledge among younger apprentices of this science.