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PROFILE: Clara Westwell-Roper

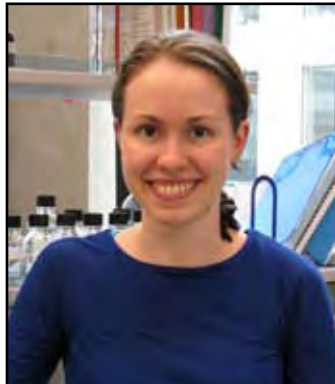
Could it be in the genes?

As a bright young scientist, Clara Westwell-Roper descends from a line of independent thinkers who are perpetually curious, ask "Why?" - and seek to find the answers. She finds inspiration from her grandfather who was an amateur cosmologist; from her mother, a philosophy professor at Capilano College, and her father, a software engineer in the private sector. Dinner conversations at home are often interesting and spirited with questions and discussions.

Clara developed a love for science in grade six and enthusiastically participated in her first science fair. The next year she received an honourable mention at the Canada-Wide Science Fair. Science fairs "provided an opportunity to ask questions based on theoretical knowledge of science, test theories and learn about the natural world in an experimental setting" she said.

In grade 10, she attended physics and genetics summer camp run by Genome BC's Education Specialist Dr. Catherine Anderson. This camp facilitated hands-on research which helped her develop a basic knowledge of molecular techniques and provided another opportunity to fuel her curiosity about cell biology. Among other awards, she received a \$5000 Genome Canada scholarship for her grade 12 project which focused on the role of p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase in macrophage nitric oxide production.

Fast forward to 2008. Finishing her BSc (Hons) in Microbiology and Immunology, Clara has just been accepted into the combined MD/PhD program at UBC. This highly competitive and unique seven-year program integrates coursework and research training in the basic sciences and clinical disciplines. Clara will be doing graduate-level



work with Dr. Bruce Verchere at the Child and Family Research Institute focusing on the role of innate immunity in diabetes development. "I want to be able to help patients understand why they are experiencing a given set of symptoms – to feel more in control and to benefit from an approach which integrates basic science with diagnostics and treatment," says Clara.

Experienced science students, such as Clara, often have a great appreciation for mentorship as it is difficult for a bright high school student to find a lab where they can create experiments and stretch their knowledge. She emphasizes the important role of academic support from instructors, supervisors, coworkers, and peers. As a member of the Board of Directors of the Science Fair Foundation of BC, Clara established the BC Science Fair Alumni Mentorship Program to help motivated high school students access resources to pursue questions that interest them.

One might think Clara has a very full schedule but when not in the lab, she enjoys many different activities including running, snowshoeing, reading 19th century English literature, playing the piano, and volunteering with St. John Ambulance Brigade. "I spend a lot of time working with programs to help students identify goals which they are passionate about – both inside and outside the classroom," says Clara. "We are fortunate here in BC to have world-class research facilities and excellent outreach programs, particularly in science and technology-related disciplines. To be able to share a bit of what we are learning about how the world works with those outside the research environment is so important to our growth as a community, to our appreciation and understanding of everyday life."