RNAi based gene therapy for HIV-1, from bench to bedside
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Karin von Eije was born on the 11th of February, 1981 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. As a child, she enjoyed interacting with other children, travelling (by getting lost), playing with small and creative things (beads, origami), and cooking. Now she still likes to meet new people, new cultures, and new recipes (also in the laboratory). Her interest in biotechnology was already present in high school, when she won the contest of the Dutch daily journal Trouw with her entry on the creation of large red radishes. When Karin was sixteen she decided to participate in the YFU Exchange Programme, which brought her to Venezuela for a year. During that year she lived with the warm Pierantozzi family and attended the “Collegio San Jose” in Guatire. In 2000 she obtained her VWO degree (pre-university education) from the “Maartenscollege” in Haren (The Netherlands) and in 2001 she obtained her propedeutic exam of medical biology at the University of Amsterdam. She then started her Medical education at the same university.

During her Medical training she was involved in many activities of the “International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations” (IFMSA). She was, for example, local president of the IFMSA-UvA, and participated in the implementation of a successful sexual education program “Het Voorspel” in Amsterdam where medical students educated high school kids. After her exchange year in Venezuela, travelling and learning from different cultures still had her interest. So, during her medical training she did a nursery internship at the Betesda nursing home in Curaçao, and also a public health internship in India at the Calcutta Village Project. Furthermore, she worked during her studies, initially as a waitress and as a medical secretary in the AMC, and later as a home care nurse for the Amsterdam Thuiszorg.

After her first year of medical studies, she got the opportunity to participate in the honors program of the AMC (Super-traject) where additional master classes, summer schools and internships were provided with a focus on science. This resulted in a research internship during her medical schooling at the department of Experimental Internal Medicine in the AMC, in the laboratory of Tom van der Poll. Under the supervision of Cees van ’t Veer she studied the effects of activated protein C on human lung epithelial cells. After passing all the written exams but before starting her
medical internships, she decided to broaden her scientific skills by pursuing a research internship in the United States focused on infectious diseases and, in particular, HIV-1.

After an orienting conversation, Ben Berkhout helped her to organize an internship in the laboratory of John Rossi at the Beckman Research Institute of the City of Hope in Duarte, California. The research was focused on RNA interference as a treatment for HIV-1. When she returned to the Netherlands, prof. Berkhout suggested that she continue her research as a PhD student in the department of Experimental Virology in the AMC in collaboration with the laboratory of John Rossi at City of Hope. Karin started this training after finishing her Master in Medicine in May 2006. The opportunity to work with these two leading research institutes in gene therapy and virology resulted in several published papers, a possible patent, and this thesis. In the future Karin has ambitions to combine medicine and research in order to contribute to the development of new therapies and improved patient care.