

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge my mentor and advisor Richard W. Roberts, who stands at the forefront for providing scientific support and guidance during my Ph.D. studies. His knowledge of our field and genuine enthusiasm for research is unmatched. This work would not have evolved into such an interdisciplinary body of research without the guidance, insight, and commitment of my colleague and fiancé, Harry Miguel Green. In addition, I sincerely appreciate the time Terry Takahashi, a fellow graduate student, spent giving me advice and guidance, as well as making the best barbeque on earth. William Ja, another fellow graduate student, is responsible for recruiting me to the Roberts group, welcoming me so warmly into the group, and including me in many dinners out. I thank my other colleagues in the Roberts group who helped to make my time in graduate school a wonderful experience, including Ryan Austin, Christopher Balmaseda, Steve Millward, Shuwei Li, Anders Olson, Cindy Qi, Christine Ueda, and Tianbing Xia. Jennifer Treweek and Binghai Li, undergraduates, were a joy to work with during my last year. Thank you Jenn and Binghai for all the late night FLASH columns and HPLC runs! The Roberts group secretary, Margot Hoyt, deserves special recognition for making sure ‘things got done.’ I must also acknowledge the José Alberola-Ila and the Alberola group, specifically Michelline Laurent, Gabriela Hernandez, and Eric Tse who has since passed away. Finally, I sincerely appreciate the support from my committee members, Peter Dervan, Dennis Dougherty, and Harry Gray, who wrote numerous letters of support on my behalf.

The first person I met at Caltech was Dian Buchness, our division secretary. Her warmth and support during my time at Caltech will always be remembered. Nelson Leonard, my ‘scientific grandfather,’ was a great source of guidance and wisdom during preparation of a JACS manuscript. Dr. Leonard is true gentleman and an inspiration to all.

Important recognition must be paid to Candace Rypisi, the Caltech Women’s Center Director, who provided many programs free of charge to the Caltech community,

especially the women's self-defense class which probably saved my life.

Mrs. Grace Verburg, a P.E.O. chapter member, nominated and helped me win a P.E.O. Scholar Award. Her encouragement and support is gratefully appreciated. The RNA society meeting in Vienna, Austria would not have been possible without this award.

My friends here at Caltech deserve many thanks for being there through it all, including Sarah Monahan, Shira Rogers-Jacobson, Catherine Oertel, Elizabeth Mayo, Pei Yun Lee, Wendy Steiner, Marcia Cooper, Caroline Englebienne and special thanks to Philippe Chatelain, who spent *hours* helping me put this thesis into LaTeX. Miguel, my love, thank you for making my time here the happiest ever, from 'sqleep-sqleep in da be' to 'looking at da tinq in da bag.' Dr. Harry Green and Dr. Manuela Martins-Green, my future in-laws, were tremendously supportive and encouraging over the past several years. I can not imagine having more loving future in-laws.

Lastly, I would like to pay tribute to my parents, Richard and Sharon Starck, my siblings Rick, Jason, and Kylie, and the best grandparents known to man, Caesar and Ruth Cappo. Although you were many miles away during my work on this thesis, your love and support were always there. See Dad, the time you spent helping me dissect the worm and the starfish paid off! Columbus you will be missed and never forgotten. Blonde Moment and Totally Blonde live in your memory. Toffee 2000, thank you for your soul-full gaze of support during the months of proposal and thesis writing.