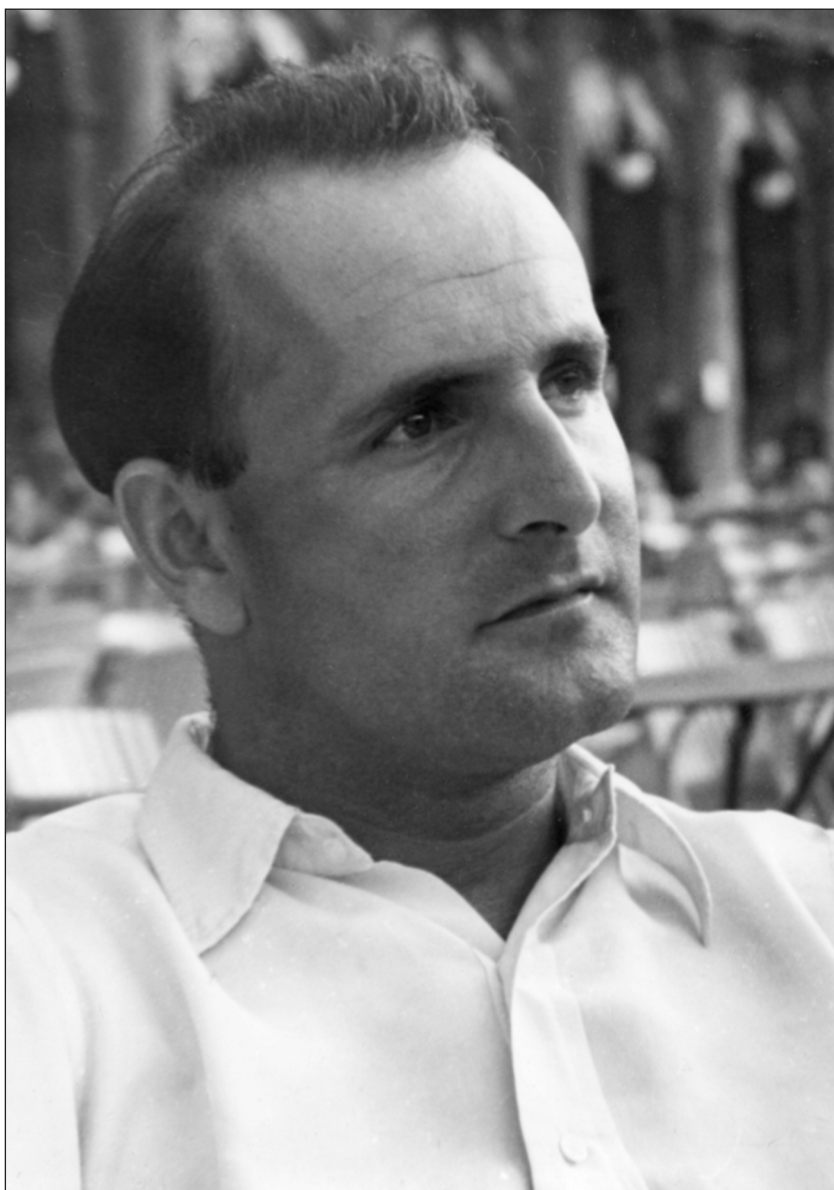


**Walter Kempner
and the Rice Diet**



Walter Kempner ca. 1934-35.

Walter Kempner and the Rice Diet

Challenging Conventional Wisdom

Barbara Newborg, MD

with Florence Nash

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

Copyright © 2011
Barbara Newborg
All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Newborg, Barbara.

Walter Kempner and the rice diet : challenging conventional wisdom / Barbara Newborg ; with Florence Nash.

p. ; cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59460-885-8 (alk. paper)

1. Kempner, Walter, 1903-1997 2. Medical scientists--North Carolina--Biography. 3. Reducing diets. 4. Rice--Therapeutic use. 5. Rice in human nutrition. I. Nash, Florence. II. Title.

[DNLM: 1. Kempner, Walter. 2. Physicians--Germany--Biography. 3. Physicians--North Carolina--Biography. 4. Diet Therapy--history--Germany. 5. Diet Therapy--history--North Carolina. 6. History, 20th Century--Germany. 7. History, 20th Century--North Carolina. 8. Hypertension--diet therapy--Germany. 9. Hypertension--diet therapy--North Carolina. 10. Kidney Diseases--diet therapy--Germany. 11. Kidney Diseases--diet therapy--North Carolina. WZ 100]

RM222.2.K4475 2010

613.2'5092--dc22

[B]

2010035764

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Illustrations	vii
Preface	ix
Ricers	3
Family and Early Childhood	13
Education: Heidelberg and Berlin	29
Crisis and Diaspora	55
A New Home	71
Neu Dahlem	87
Development of the Rice Diet	119
Results	129
Kudos and Controversy	155
The Rice Houses	167
In the Laboratory	183
Building the Financial Foundations	193
The Gadfly	215
Bibliography	233
List of Names	241
Glossary	249
Index	251

Illustrations

Frontispiece.	Walter Kempner ca. 1934–35.	
Figure 1.	Walter Kempner’s father Walter, 1896.	17
Figure 2.	Lydia Rabinowitsch Kempner.	18
Figure 3.	Walter and Lydia Rabinowitsch Kempner with their children at home in Berlin ca. 1904.	21
Figure 4.	Nadja, Walter, and Robert Kempner in August 1903.	21
Figure 5.	The Kempner house at Potsdamerstrasse 58a.	23
Figure 6.	Walter Kempner with his dog Lump, ca. 1911.	25
Figure 7.	The cast of <i>Antigone</i> , the 1920 production by Walter Kempner and his schoolmates at the Schiller-Gymnasium.	27
Figure 8.	Stefan George.	31
Figure 9.	Friedrich Gundolf in Berlin, 1927, holding lion cub.	32
Figure 10.	Nadja Kempner and Clotilde Schlayer at the Boetticherstrasse house, ca. 1930.	34
Figure 11.	Barbara Zielke (later Schultz).	34
Figure 12.	Ernst Gundolf and Walter Kempner in Greece, ca. 1932.	35
Figure 13.	The house at Boetticherstrasse 15c.	36
Figure 14.	Clotilde Schlayer with Magog in the house on Boetticherstrasse, Dahlem, 1930–31.	37
Figure 15.	Felix Schlayer and his wife, Rosa Albagés y Gallego, in their garden at Torrelodones, Spain, ca. 1950.	40
Figure 16.	Gerda von Puttkamer.	42
Figure 17.	Stefan George and Clotilde Schlayer with Magog in the garden at Boetticherstrasse, ca. 1931–32.	48
Figure 18.	Molino del Orso, the house in Minusio, near Locarno, Switzerland.	56
Figure 19.	Edit Ullstein Glaser, probably in the late 1920s.	88

Figure 20. Edit Glaser's house at 2110 Wilson Street.	88
Figure 21. Fides Ruestow, ca. 1930.	90
Figure 22. Ernst Peschel.	94
Figure 23. Ruth Lohmann Peschel, probably ca. 1950s.	94
Figures 24 & 25. Charlotte Tilley poses with a llama, and Christa von Roebel with a lion cub.	97
Figures 26 & 27. The author on a summer trip, ca. 1950.	100
Figure 28. Mercedes Gaffron in Switzerland, 1941.	101
Figure 29. Charlotte Tilley, Clotilde Schlayer, and the author at Dr. Gaffron's house at 1612 Maryland Avenue, Durham, 1962.	102
Figure 30. Hanna Ruestow, ca. 1960.	109
Figure 31. Rosabel Eadie, ca. 1950.	110
Figure 32. Helen Starke, 1953.	111
Figure 33. Patient after 8 months on rice diet.	130
Figures 34 & 35. Eyeground images before and after rice diet.	133
Figures 36 & 37. Nephrotic patient, seen at entry and after four months on rice diet.	140
Figure 38. Eyeground images before and after rice diet	146
Figures 39 & 40. Patient at a four-year followup appeared a generation younger.	150
Figure 41. Dr. Kempner talking with patients at a "station" in the Mangum Street rice house.	172
Figure 42. Patients socializing on the porch at Mangum Street.	173
Figure 43. The dining room of the Mangum Street rice house.	173
Figure 44. A lab technician testing for chloride in rice diet patients' urine.	185
Figure 45. Members of the Walter Kempner Foundation at a meeting in Durham, October 1950.	211
Figure 46. Walter Kempner on vacation in Santorini, ca. 1970.	227
Figure 47. Walter Kempner in 1974.	227
Figure 48. Traveling companions at the Caffè Greco in Rome, ca. 1962.	231

Preface

In 1939, I was a sophomore at Swarthmore College. My best friend there was Judith Perlzweig from Durham, North Carolina, where her father chaired the Department of Biochemistry at Duke University Medical Center. For spring break that March, Judith invited me to spend some time with her in Durham and meet some of her friends. I accepted with pleasure, grateful to have an alternative to spending all ten days in the rather formal and chilly atmosphere of my own home in New York City. My family was not close.

My train arrived in Durham in the morning, and on that day, as usual, Mrs. Perlzweig had a guest for lunch. Shortly before lunchtime, I remember, Judith and I started walking down the road to meet the guest's car. When it appeared, we ran and jumped onto the running boards to hitch a ride back up to the house. The handsome, beautifully dressed young man at the wheel was Dr. Walter Kempner, brought to the United States from Berlin in 1934 as one of the European scientists and scholars rescued from the looming Nazi threat. A cell physiologist, Dr. Kempner had been offered a research position in the Department of Medicine at Duke's new medical school. The department chairman, Dr. Frederic Hanes, had arranged for him to be housed initially with the Perlzweigs, as Mrs. Perlzweig was German-speaking. Dr. Kempner stayed in their household from October 1934 until May 1935, and he continued to be a nearly daily lunch guest for some years.

After lunch, Dr. Kempner took Judith and me to see his laboratory, and then to a small house where two of his friends from Germany were staying, Miss Fides Ruestow and Mrs. Edit Ullstein Glaser. Over tea and fruit tarts, they engaged in stimulating conversation. Dr. Kempner teased and challenged me: memorize one thousand lines of Shakespeare, identify and locate the major constellations. At some point during my visit, he invited Judith and me to help out in his laboratory, which we did. Our chief task was washing and sorting glassware. I think Dr. Kempner was simply interested to see how we would conduct ourselves in the lab; he was always very curious about people, as I came to learn, and may have wondered whether we had an aptitude for science.

When I got back to Swarthmore after making Dr. Kempner's acquaintance, for the first time in my life I read a Shakespeare play—*Cymbeline*—from beginning to end. Life seemed to be richer than I had imagined. My childhood in New York City had been shaped by a middle-class family that believed mar-

riage to be more or less the only worthwhile aim for a young girl. My parents had many acquaintances but—so it seemed to me—no close friends, whereas I had always had a friend or two but rarely any “acquaintances.” After my four days in Durham I felt that new doors had opened, inviting me into new possibilities of friendship and ideas. Many years later, Judith admitted to me that it had been her hope and expectation that bringing me together with Dr. Kempner and his circle would result in lasting friendships, with just such an effect on my life.

I was dazzled by these foreigners, by their informed and animated talk. Dr. Kempner’s friends, Miss Ruestow and Mrs. Ullstein Glaser, had fled the Nazi regime and followed him to North Carolina. On that visit to Durham, I also was introduced to Dr. Clotilde Schlayer, who had met Walter Kempner in 1920 through his sister Nadja, her friend and schoolmate, and had come to the United States in 1935 to work with him at Duke. By the time of my first visit in 1939, a small group of German compatriots and colleagues in exile had gathered in Durham. After the war, others joined Dr. Kempner and I became acquainted with them as well. The warmth and closeness of this group, their wonderful cooking, their sophistication in all things cultural combined with great simplicity of living—all this was powerfully attractive to me. I was spellbound. I started spending parts of my vacations with the group, working in Dr. Kempner’s lab and visiting the circle of émigré friends at their rented summer houses in Kennebunkport, Maine, and Ocean City, Maryland.

At Swarthmore, I had been pursuing a major in Western European history with a minor in mathematics, but I had no particular career goals or expectations. My encounter with Dr. Kempner changed all that. Several times he had mentioned that he thought medicine would be an ideal career for me, and by my senior year I was convinced. When I told my parents that I wanted to attend medical school, they were less than delighted. Their plans for my future extended no further than a conventional marriage, though my father might possibly have envisioned me as a lawyer, his own profession.

I persisted, and after graduating from Swarthmore in 1941, I spent a year taking premedical courses at New York University. In the late spring of 1942, I moved to Durham where I found a statistical job at North Carolina State University in Raleigh and worked part-time in Dr. Kempner’s laboratory. I took additional premed correspondence courses at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill to support my application to Duke Medical School, which accepted me for entrance in January 1944.

I returned to New York to spend the Christmas holidays with my family before beginning medical school, hoping to achieve some sort of reconciliation

with them over my career choice. While there, I became ill, and it was several months before I was able to return to Durham, by which time I had missed the opportunity to enter Duke Medical School. Instead, I resumed work in Dr. Kempner's laboratory and, with the help of his friends, applied for medical school at the University of North Carolina and was accepted in 1945. After completing my studies at UNC, which at that time offered only a two-year program, I transferred to Johns Hopkins University and received my medical degree there in 1949. Upon graduation I returned to Duke as an intern and then as an assistant resident, and in 1952 I joined Dr. Kempner's clinical staff at Duke.

I worked with Dr. Kempner for forty years, becoming his chief medical associate. My main role was to help him treat patients, but I also struggled to understand his basic scientific ideas, because I saw that his new and—to me—strange concepts represented a revolutionary and eminently successful approach to the treatment of vascular and metabolic diseases. And I, like virtually everyone who encountered him, was fascinated with Walter Kempner himself. He was the most brilliant person I have ever known, broadly educated, charismatic, and unassailably confident. While he was absolutely uncompromising in his fight to reverse diseases long thought to be irreversible, he had great charm and humor and was able to cajole—or, if necessary, browbeat—his patients into following what he himself admitted was an “unpleasant and monotonous” regime, the rice diet. (As he said, “The only excuse for such a therapy is that it works!”) He also drew to himself a circle of devoted friends who were themselves extraordinary in many ways. In my long association with him and his companions, I learned first-hand about the politics and culture of prewar Germany, the rise of the Nazis and the diaspora of Jews and other “undesirables,” about European history both ancient and modern, and, especially, about the true meaning of friendship and family.

Numerous individuals who played a part in Dr. Kempner's life have been the subjects of research and publication: Eugene A. Stead, Robert Koch, Otto Warburg, not to mention Stefan George, Friedrich Gundolf, and the Stauffenberg brothers. This, by contrast, is the first extensive biographical sketch of Dr. Kempner. During his lifetime the public knew only his medical work and publications; his friendships and his literary and artistic interests remained strictly private. I have undertaken this narrative because I thought it was important to draw together the most important threads of his life as well as his work, and I have been encouraged by close friends who felt similarly. The book is, of course, far from exhaustive, but it may interest future researchers on Dr. Kempner, a remarkable scientist who helped to transform the treatment of cardiovascular, renal and metabolic diseases, and a complex

individual through whose life were woven many strands of Western intellectual and political history.

After Dr. Kempner died in 1997, I began to organize and preserve the voluminous documents of his research and treatment of more than 18,000 patients. These records are deposited in the archives of Duke University Medical Center. The entire history of Walter Kempner's rice diet treatment is available there and provides data for historians of medicine. Dr. Kempner published scientific articles from 1927 to 1993; reprints of many of these articles are no longer available. To remedy this situation, they have been collected and republished in a two-volume set [2002, 2004].

The material in the chapters that follow comes from these articles as well as from Dr. Kempner's correspondence and clinical records over seventy-odd years. He was a prolific correspondent, to both friends and patients. Most of the clinical and scientific materials, formerly in my possession, have been deposited in the Duke University Medical Center Archives. Most of Dr. Kempner's personal letters are now in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek in Stuttgart, home of the Stefan George Archive, in the section containing documents of Dr. Clotilde Schlayer and her friends. Dr. Schlayer's letters have been a mine of information as well. My account also relies to a great extent on my own recollection of years of conversations, and stories recounted over the dinner table by Dr. Kempner and his friends. I have verified my recollections where possible with the people mentioned in this book, or with their surviving family and friends, including Judith Perlzweig Binder, Alexander Schlayer, and Katharina Mommsen. I am grateful to Maik Bozza at the Stefan George Archive for his assistance, to Doris Marriott for her tireless and miraculously productive research in the archives, and to Danielle Schmechel, who was a great help in organizing our files for the book. Dr. Frank Neelon gave generously of his time and good counsel, for which he has my warm thanks. In particular, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Joan Mertens, without whom this book would not exist. She too was a friend and admirer of the remarkable people at the center of this story, and she has generously supported its writing with scholarly and meticulous editing. My warmest appreciation goes to Florence Nash who, with endless patience, enthusiasm, sensitivity, and verbal resourcefulness, helped me weave together information from many diverse sources into an integrated narrative.