

HOW WE GOT TO TEXAS

After José had been at the V.A. for five years, he heard about the Fulbright Professorship Program. A research biochemist of the Merck Laboratories, Dr. Weiss, had just returned from Germany, where he had been a Fulbright Professor at a research laboratory in Munich. He was invited by Dr. Pietrolongo of the VA Clinical Laboratory to present some of the analytical methods he had developed while there. After the presentation, a group of staff doctors and José took Dr. Weiss out for lunch. Here he discussed the need for a researcher to leave his place of work after about four or five years (in other words, to take a sabbatical) in order to refresh his knowledge. He explained how, after his own return to Merck, he had been able to function more efficiently and become far more productive.

José proceeded to get all the information he could regarding complete procedures and handling necessary to obtain a Fulbright. As soon as he received application forms, he stopped in to see Dr. Cooney, Chief of Staff at the VA Hospital, asking for his permission to apply. Realizing that Dr. Cooney might not remember this request later, José had him immediately initial his application form. José knew full well that it would take many months to hear from the State Department, and then many months more for the fellowship to actually begin.

Approximately six months later, a letter arrived from the State Department. It officially confirmed that José had been awarded a one-year grant to study in Germany. Immediately, José began to inquire about housing there for himself, his wife and his children in the town of Goettingen. Information forthcoming from Lufthansa Airlines, among other sources, confirmed that the housing situation there was extremely bleak. World War II had severely damaged the area, and there was no family housing available. José then sent letters to the University at Goettingen and, specifically, to the professor under whom he would be working. Again, he was advised to come alone. He would be welcome, he was told, to live at the professor's home for the entire year.

José obtained an appointment with the Fulbright Operational Committee, making a special trip to Washington, to see if he could get any help here. Explaining to them that he could not leave his wife and children for a year, he requested that they do whatever possible to get family housing or some sort of arrangements provided. A few weeks later, he was informed that housing in all German research centers was extremely limited, and that several American families, after having traveled there, had had to return. In speaking again to the Head of the Fulbright Committee, José convinced them to change his award from Germany to Denmark. This, they told him, would rest upon the stipulation that José obtain an invitation from Professor Lindstrom-Lang of the Carlsberg Laboratorium in Copenhagen. The Professor would have to stipulate that he would

welcome José, and would provide technicians and a laboratory for his research, as well as guarantee housing for José and the family. It would not be until June of that year that José would finally receive these assurances. First, he would have to travel to the Gordon Research Conference in New Hampshire, which Professor Lindstrom-Lang was also attending, to speak to the Professor about his situation and obtain his acceptance.

Meanwhile, it was already January of 1957, and José's Fulbright Professorship was due to begin September 1st of the same year. This announcement, together with legal papers for travel arrived. José immediately went to see Dr. Cooney. He informed him that arrangements for the fellowship had been secured, and that only a few details remained to be worked out. José would be leaving for one year without pay, returning the following September in 1958.

Dr. Cooney exploded. He had no replacement for José, he told him. Therefore, he could not let him leave. José explained how complicated everything had been, and that now finally most of the details were in place. He promised to get somebody to act as his replacement for the year he would be away. Dr. Cooney refused to hear about it. He asked for the name and address of the doctor that had originally suggested a sabbatical for José. José gave him the name of Dr. Weiss at Merck.

Then Dr. Cooney issued an ultimatum. 'Forget about this whole thing,' he admonished, 'or resign!'

Herewith, he opened a cabinet, where he kept resignation forms already typed. There was one prepared for each of the chiefs at the hospital. The reason listed, in all cases, was either 'personal' or 'health.' Confronted with the resignation form thrust into his hand, José signed. Then he asked permission to call Houston, Texas. In those days, long distance calls could be made only with the permission of the Chief of Staff, using his phone line. Dr. Cooney demanded to know why José wanted to call Texas. José explained that he had several times been offered a job there at a higher salary than he was making at the VA.

When José reached Dr. Herbert Allen at Houston's Methodist Hospital, he explained the situation. He would like to come, he told Dr. Allen, for six months before leaving for his Fulbright in Europe. In this way he could see if he liked it in Texas and if he would want to remain there permanently. Dr. Allen assured him that he would be well received at Houston's Methodist Hospital, as well as at Baylor University under these conditions.

The next day, José cleared his belongings out of the Philadelphia VA Hospital. Immediately, Dr. Cooney replaced him, at a higher salary and rank, with Dr. Weiss. When José asked Dr. Cooney why he had changed his mind about the Fulbright Professorship after originally giving José permission to apply for it, the answer was, 'Because I never thought you would get it!'

A few days later, José flew to Houston. He was warmly received and, a few days later, he got the chance to personally meet most of Baylor's research scientists at a cocktail party that was given in his honor. Dr. Cooley, the renowned heart surgeon who was Head of all research there, attended. (Years later, in 1965, when José would again be visiting Baylor to lecture there, Dr. Cooley would invite him to witness one of the first aorta aneurysm operations. The patient would be none other than the movie actress Jeanette McDonald who, unfortunately would die during that surgery.)

Upon his arrival in Houston in 1957, José was immediately given the title of Associate Professor of Biochemistry at Baylor. (At that time, back in Philadelphia, no faculty appointments had been permitted for any of the VA staff.)

When he left to take the position in Houston, José left Josy with the children and with the task of selling their Philadelphia house in Overbrook Park. This took about three months, after which she and the children came to join José in Texas.