

## OHLA

In 1953, to start the laboratory functioning, José began to search for a low-level technician. In the early '50's, while the Korean conflict was on, securing chemical technicians was a difficult task. In those days, to increase interest in working at the V.A. Hospital, the Civil Service Commission raised the entering salary of most technicians from the first level of the established pay scale to the tenth step. This meant that a starting technician would receive, not the initial salary, but one equivalent to the pay of those who had been working there for over ten years. (This unusual salary situation was not rescinded until the early 1970's, by which time a large pool of technicians was judged to now be available.)

Shortly after José put out the announcement for his search, a strikingly attractive young lady appeared, requesting the job. Her credentials were impeccable. She had completed part of her training in a medical school in the Ukraine during World War II. She explained that the Germans had permitted many Ukrainian students to remain in school because of the students' dislike of the Russian Government and their sympathy for the Germans. The documents shown by the young woman that José interviewed were in Ukrainian and German, and did not include a photograph. The young woman spoke good English, though, and appeared to know her material well. José hired her, instructing her to appear for Personnel processing and, as soon as this had been completed, to report to his laboratory for duty.

The person who reported for duty a few days later, however, did not look at all like the person he had interviewed. She was not attractive at all, nor was she as sharp in her thinking and her knowledge. Yet she presented the same identical papers that were required to be turned in to Personnel. Since there was a great shortage of chemists, however, José decided not to make an issue about these discrepancies. Subsequently, he discovered that the woman he had originally interviewed was now employed at Temple University, at a considerably higher salary. The person now in his employ was her sister, and this one's name was Ohla. José worked long and hard training Ohla in her duties and, eventually, she grew able to adequately, though ploddingly, handle the workload.

Around this time, the University of Pennsylvania was running a project on human artificial conception at a small research institute (Ferris) attached to the University. At that time, this institute was located at the northeast corner of 36th and Walnut Streets, in the upper floor of what was then a bank building. This was the place, José remembered, where Roscoe, one of José's previous research collaborators, used to go to donate his sperm in order to make twenty to twenty-five dollars per week as additional income. Roscoe had been very popular as a donor, since he was tall, blue-eyed, and quite handsome. The hopeful mothers-to-

be were supposed to select, from a list given to them beforehand, a donor to "match" their husbands' physical characteristics, and Roscoe was called upon frequently.

Roscoe also happened to be quite successful with his amorous pursuits. The result was that he sometimes yielded low sperm counts in the samples that he donated to the Ferris Clinic. Many calls arriving for Roscoe from the Sperm Center used to come to José's former laboratory, and these would arrive at various unexpected times, usually when a female recipient happened to be ovulating. José recalled how, one Monday morning, after a prolonged weekend that Roscoe had spent with a nurse whom he had met the Friday before, a call suddenly came in from the Sperm Center around 9:30 A.M. Sleep-deprived and exhausted, Roscoe had asked around the laboratory for somebody else to substitute as the donor. When nobody complied, he jokingly remarked, "Well, I guess I'll need a nurse at Ferris to help me along today!"

Later on, José found out that many of the semen specimens at the Institute were not used when their sperm count was low. Also, he learned, when no ovulation occurred in the recipient, the semen was discarded. Upon hearing this, he approached Dr. Ferris and inquired about obtaining several of these samples, so that he could carry out some basic research on the metabolism of sperm in his own laboratory at the V.A. Soon afterwards, the Institute agreed to willingly donate the material that they could not use, with the stipulation that José send somebody to personally pick up each specimen, and that no identification numbers be passed along. This continued for many months and, in this way, some valuable biochemical information on the utilization of metabolites by the sperm was obtained. Several years later, José would publish this information in a research article [Ann. Penn. Acad. Sci. (1960) 34, 232].

Various interesting occurrences developed while the specimens were being collected. Once, during a cold spell, a rather difficult technician named Henry, who was working for José at the time, left to collect a specimen and did not return for four hours. During this interval, he had left the specimen in an incubating oven (something that is never done) to be kept warm, and here it had spoiled. When José examined the specimen, the sperm was dead, which would invalidate the experiment. José verbally reprimanded Henry for having taken four hours, and for leaving the specimen in a situation where it had spoiled. Henry answered, "Give me ten minutes and I'll get you another specimen!" Twenty minutes later, Henry returned from the bathroom with a test-tube containing a viable specimen of his own sperm. The experiment was now carried out, quite successfully.

However, Henry continued to disappear for long periods of time throughout the days that followed. After this had happened numerous occasions, José became suspicious. Because the V.A. could not investigate, he took it upon himself to find

out what was going on. After many telephone calls and exhaustive questioning, José discovered that Henry was holding down another job in a laboratory at the University, juggling his time between the V.A. and Penn. José immediately told Henry that he had better transfer out of the V.A. to the other job at the University. Hereupon, Henry began to cry. He announced that he was going to enter a Medical School, that his father ran a pushcart cigarette and candy stand, and that he, Henry, was also helping to run this business. José bid him a firm good-bye and wished him well.

A few weeks later, Henry suddenly reappeared. He was carrying with him papers for unemployment compensation. He wanted José to sign these so that he, Henry, could collect pay for having been let go "without", as he put it, "a specific reason!" "I might as well get some pay," he explained, "since you fired me without giving me a specific reason!" José, of course, refused.

Henry's departure required that somebody else now bring the semen samples over from the Ferris Institute to José's lab. Ohla was chosen for this task. The semen, before use, had to be mixed with various reagents and pipetted into different incubation containers (Warburg tubes). This Ohla now also did. After several dozen of these experiments had been completed, Ohla finally discovered that the material she had been pipetting was semen. Immediately, she took to gargling all day long. She also washed her hands continuously, crossing herself as she did so. These experiments lasted only a few more months. When completed, Ohla was no longer involved with semen but, rather, with tissue sections for incubation.

Months went by and, one day, Ohla announced that she had become engaged to be married. The young man was somebody that her family had selected for her. Never once did he come to the lab to visit, to get acquainted with her coworkers, or even to inquire about her. Months later, Ohla requested a very personal private talk with José. She wanted to know if José could write a letter to her priest, explaining that the work being carried out was very important, and that the life of many veterans would be benefitted and helped by it. Therefore, this work should, under no circumstances, be interrupted, even for a short period. Therefore José should request, in the letter, that although Ohla could get married, she should have no honeymoon or, in any way, be distracted from her job. She should also, the letter was to state, work nights as well. José told Ohla that she should see her priest, and discuss with him her problems about her marriage which, to José, seemed obvious. But José refused to write the letter that she requested. Eventually, Ohla married her fiancé. Many months later, she quit her job because, she said, of the low salary it paid, and left to go to work elsewhere.