

*More* ~~(XXX)~~DEPARTMENT OF ~~LIFE SCIENCES~~ Biology  
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92502

31 January 1977

Dear Josh,

Several weeks ago Betty and I visited Arthur and Priscilla Pollister, who are spending a few months in a rented cottage at King's Ranch, Apache Junction, just east of Phoenix Arizona. I should have written you earlier before many of the details became blurred but the problem was that he told me so much that would interest you that the task of writing it all out seemed impossible. Then I had a lousy case of prostatitis and, now at home getting well, think I better send some notes along to you.

I told him of the sorts of things that interested you and that I suggested you write him. He had a vague feeling that you had done so but could not recall what happened. He did have a guilty feeling that the questions would have required such a lengthy reply that such would not have been practical. But he did say that he would very much like to see you and discuss in detail the history of genetical events at Columbia and in the NYC region. I was amazed at how much he did know and remember-- and it is no doubt that he is very interested. If you and M could pay the Pollisters a visit before early March, you would not find only many answers to your questions but see a very interesting region of Sonoran Desert. It seemed to Betty and to me much richer and more interesting than the Colorado Desert. Guess Summer Rains vs Winter Rains do make a vast difference. When Betty comes home from the lab I will ask if she has a fuller address and telephone number for the Pollisters and put this at the end of the letter.

I asked Arthur especially about his relation with Alfred. It is clear that the relation meant much to Arthur. In the early days the two became very close and possibly for Arthur's reserved New England ways too close. He mentioned how the Mirskys would visit them frequently in NYC and in Maine in the summer. (The Pollisters were not very social themselves). Arthur was clearly embarrassed that, when walking down the sidewalk of a Maine town, Alfred would hold on to Arthur's arm! Arthur seemed to be implying that ordinary Maine folk might think that a rather strange couple.

But there was always great resistance to some of Arthur's notions and efforts made to suppress them. I guess this was mainly a matter of Alfred feeling that protein was the important gene material and Arthur thinking it more likely nucleic acid. Arthur said that he was convinced by the early 1940's that it was DNA and so reported it at the Dallas meetings of the AAAS in 1941.

I asked if he had published and the usual answer<sup>n</sup> came, "no". But he said it should have been in an abstract of the American Society of Zoologists. At that time the ASZ abstracts were published, if I remember correctly, in the Anatomical Record. I had hoped to check this for you but, maybe, later.

I well remember that meeting. As a very young squirt I had been asked to appear with the immortals in a symposium on Evolution. This was especially awesome since I had to speak from the pulpit(!) in one of the churches. I kept one eye up for the expected thunderbolt. On the way down Alfred and I had travelled coach and spent the whole night talking. He was much concerned whether or not his research was 'important'. I suggested that it did not make all that difference if it was carefully done and interesting and rewarding to him. He did not buy that. I felt then and afterwards ~~were~~ very friendly with Alfred and even closer to Arthur.

But bak<sup>c</sup> to those two. Alfred had a way of stalling on things Arthur wanted to publish and on one occasion even went so far as to 'lose' a ms that was in single copy. Knowing Arthur, I can imagine that he was wholly unable to cope with this. First of all a friend was acting this way. Then too Arthur was not a biochemist and would have assumed that Alfred knew far more than he. Finally Arthur was, and is in many ways, a very shy and unsure person. He once told me how very difficult it was to operate in the world (ie, in NYC) ~~when~~ after being raised in the backwoods of Maine. He often felt social unease. My relations with him were always easy and close and, quite possibly, he understood that coming from the backwoods of Virginia did not make things all that easy either. But as an example of this unease, one day my mother was coming up to Schermerhorn (on a Sunday no doubt) and, having told her so much about Arthur, she wanted to meet him. I went down to the 9th floor to ask him and he seemed very embarrassed and said he had to leave just then--which he did.

But the break with Alfred was very specific. Arthur, I guess finally and in desperation, wrote up a paper and sent it off to be published without telling Alfred. It had to do with the amount of protein in the nucleus--Arthur could show with his methods that there was a lot whereas the extraction procedures of Mirsky removed it before it was detected. This came out in PNAS--about 1943<sub>±</sub>. That did it.

Later there was the battle to get, or not to get, Mirsky at Columbia. Arthur said it was probably far better for him that the move failed. Dunn and Dobzhansky were the main "pros". But the Department was split evenly so evenly that when it came my turn to express an opinion--being the Barnard rep., the vote was exactly even. ~~It was about my first meeting too, or at least an early one.~~ I never did vote saying that with the dept so evenly violently and violently con ~~that~~ it would be lunacy--and unfair to the candidate to ask him to come. In retrospect, guess that really was a 'no'.

Not really  
remember  
the  
trauma

Arthur talked for hours--we were there part of Sat, Sun, and part of Mon. Most of it was about Columbia and its denizens. All in all a warm and nostalgic occasion that Betty and I greatly enjoyed.

Arthur and Pricilla have both aged, of course. She looks very old he not nearly as old as we had expected. They drove to Arizona which tells something of their state of health. He continues to do lots of work around the houses he owns. He seemed not at all interested in the Columbia of today. Was not even aware that Biology was getting a new building. But he is still ~~xx~~ very much the same old AWP. His current delight is a Hewlett-Packard. Said he took an old data sheet that dated ~~xx~~ back to the days of his ~~photographic~~ micro spectrophotometric determinations of proteins and nucleic acid in cells. He remembered that in the late 1940's it had taken him several weeks to do all the computations on that page-- with his 'toy' he could do it in half an hour. His eyes really shone when telling me all this.

Sorry about all the typos but, as I always must tell my friends, if they use the ~~neigh~~'nearest neighbor'method they can usually get the meaning: Take the letter that makes no sense in the work and, while gazing at a standard keyboard, see what letters are nearby. Substitute then one after ~~xx~~ the other-- usually something will make sense.

Trust that you did get the camera--unbroken. Thought I better ask before we discard the enclosed receipt.

Betty and I still remember with much joy our Christmas eve in the desert with you and M.

If you can possibly get to the base of the Superstition Mountains, where the Kings Ranch is located, you will find lots of gold awaiting you. That is also the area of the Lost Dutchman mine--maybe you can find that also.

My very best



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