

## An Impressive Professor

At first glance, he was not an impressive professor. His stature was slight, even scrawny. He had a hatchet face with a mean glint in his eye. And his personality was somewhat abrasive. He kept us on edge.

W. H. Hollander seemed to enjoy attacking students in his classes. Most of the students, including myself, seldom dared to answer his queries in class, even when we had studied the assignment carefully. I recall one brave girl who answered one of his questions; for her temerity was cross-examined with the entire class feeling sorry for her. Hollander finally backed into a corner and in utter frustration, she blurted out,

“But it said so in the text!”

Hollander’s response was,

“Who wrote that text?”

If it had been me, I would have been lost. But that studious girl even knew the author’s name! She told Hollander who had written our assignment. He said,

“Give that author an F.”

Many students, after the class, were really angry with Professor Hollander for his seemingly unfair attack. But I think that it was then I first understood the man. The class was Advanced Genetics 630 and certainly W. H. Hollander knew the subject well. We were learning about concordance and discordance, about spontaneous mutations and induced mutations, about chemical mutagens and radiation from a man who had studied with the great H. J. Muller and E. B. Wilson, men who pioneered in these studies. But there was a hidden agenda in Hollander’s teaching. He was trying to do more than teach us the subject. He was trying to teach us to be independent thinkers!

Hollander wanted us to never accept someone else’s word for anything. He wanted us to check out everything and to look at everything, not only with a critical eye but freed from science’s past biases. He wanted to enhance our potential to become truly great scientists.

Once I understood that, I appreciated his antics in class and even on his tests. Like the time one of the test questions asked us to explain the significance of  $Ba(Na)_2$ . A number of students fell into his trap. We had been studying some mutagenic chemicals. The ones who had not learned his lesson taught to impress him with what they had learned and “shot the bull”—everything they knew about mutagenic chemicals. But I was wary—Hollander wary—a trait that has stayed with me throughout my life.

Ba(Na)<sub>2</sub> is not a chemical agent but could be deciphered as Banana. I aced the test and the class.

I also left the class with gratitude to this man who left an indelible impression on my life.

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