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An interview conducted by
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that whether they liked the way that Brink brought him or whether they liked him personally was irrelevant. Wisconsin had made a very wise move.

S: People, meaning some people in the genetics department?

C: In the genetics department, yes.

S: Did you and the Lederbergs meet socially?

C: Yes a great deal.

S: His wife was also a geneticist.

C: I met her at the same time I met him at Cold Spring Harbor. But after we moved here we were very close socially. We both lived in University Houses. We were close neighbors and saw a great deal of each other.

S: Was she contented with what had been found for her? What was it, an army project?

C: I don't know how she was supported. I do remember that she was a graduate student and did a thesis essentially under her husband's direction. I also remember that officially her major professor was Brink. This was done in order that she wouldn't be being judged by her husband as to how well she did in the program.

S: Oh I see, she was doing graduate work here.

C: Yes.

S: I thought she already had finished.

C: No, she got her Ph.D. degree here.

S: I see.

C: I think she had a masters when she came. She and her husband worked very closely together, although each of them had slightly separate problems. I think she was quite happy as a scientist. She was quite ambitious in her own right, and I suppose it must have been a little bit frustrating to have this genius husband. People had a tendency, when she had an idea, to think

it was simply one that Joshua had tossed off. But I never heard her say any such thing. She was a good scientist on her own.

S: But not a great one?

C: Not in his class. But then he was unique, so it's no discredit to her to say that.

S: Genetics wasn't attached at all to the Medical School at the time when you came. You must have found this unusual. Did you? Because customarily I think genetics departments were associated with the Medical School.

C: They were beginning to be. Very shortly after I came here, I was asked to give a few lectures to the medical students. I did that every year. It was actually a gradually increasing number. It started with two or three lectures and got up to a dozen or so. I did that for several years. Joshua gave some lectures too. Sometimes we'd do these things jointly. This was in the mid-fifties, I've forgotten the dates.

S: Well we'll get into that next time. The formation of medical genetics. Was Lederberg a good teacher? A classroom teacher I mean.

C: For good students he was great. For poor or indifferent students he wasn't. The first year or two that I taught genetics he handled one of the discussion sections for me. I tried to get all of the graduate students into one discussion section and put him in charge of that. That worked very well. That was just right for them and for him. With the poor students in the undergraduate class he was a disaster; he was speaking far over their heads. His own course usually had a high dropout rate in the first few days of the course, so only the serious students were left. But for those he was magnificent. I attended the class. Many other faculty did. There were about as many faculty attending as students.

S: What was the class called?

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S: What was the class called?

C: It was bacterial genetics or genetics of microorganisms, or something like this. Almost anything that he was teaching was new. A large share of it was his own work because he really was the field at that time. It's unusual in science for one person to dominate a field as completely as he did for several years. I attended the class more than once because the field moved so fast that doing this every two or three years was a painless way to keep up with it.

S: Was he beginning to get offers right away?

C: Yes he had offers continuously. Whether right away I'm not sure, but as soon as I got here I knew several universities were trying to get him. He was the bright young man in genetics at that time. I myself was asked about him by two or three places, particularly the University of California-Berkeley, who tried very hard to get him. I think he really seriously considered it too.

S: Why didn't he go?

C: I don't know, although I'm sure he told me at the time. I don't think it was any single cause. I think he just decided that Wisconsin was a good place and that there was not enough of an improvement to move. It was clear though by about 1956 that he had pretty well decided he didn't want to spend all of his life at Wisconsin. Part of this is guessing on my part, but not entirely, because I talked with him a great deal. He wanted very much to get into computers. He decided to center his whole life around a computer if possible, the sort of thing people do routinely now, but it was new in those days. One of the incentives for his moving to Stanford was an excellent computer setup. We weren't bad at Wisconsin but the situation there seemed more what he would like. And then, too, he was interested in the medical program there. Stanford was then expanding very rapidly in the

basic sciences associated with medicine. They had made two or three other outstanding appointments. Lederberg joined an excellent group of people there. I was offered a job at Stanford at the same time, incidentally.

S: Really?

C: It was a package deal. Stanford wouldn't have offered it to me independently, but they did offer a place to both of us.

S: How could they make a package deal? I've never heard of two professors being a package deal.

C: Well, I think Stanford knew that Josh would be more likely to go to Stanford if they brought me along too. Our close friendship was well known, and he wanted me to come too. He may have engineered it. It was a hard decision for me. I came very close to moving to Stanford.

S: And why didn't you?

C: Oh, it's hard to say exactly. One reason was that Ann preferred for me to stay in Madison. But there were other reasons. I had been instrumental in bringing Sewall Wright here to Wisconsin, and I didn't like the idea of having persuaded him to come here and then leaving two or three years later. That was a strong reason. Also I had strong personal ties to Wisconsin as I do now. I viewed it this way: at a time when I wasn't known at all, and had no research reputation, Wisconsin took me on, gave me a chance, gave me a laboratory, gave me stimulating colleagues, and gave me a chance to develop a reputation. So I felt I owed Wisconsin something too. It was all these things put together.

S: Just while we're talking about Lederberg. One person I interviewed, Van Potter, said that he tried to persuade Lederberg to stay because he felt that having gotten the Nobel Prize here he owed Wisconsin some more of his time. He, Van Potter, leaves the impression that, in fact, it was rather

unfair of Lederberg to leave. Did you feel that way at all?

C: No, I didn't have quite that feeling. I did try to persuade him to stay, but not very hard. Lederberg had pretty well decided that he was going to leave Wisconsin within the next few years before the Nobel Prize came, so there is really no cause and effect relationship there. I think Lederberg himself had some feelings of this kind; he didn't quite like the idea of leaving immediately after getting the prize. But I think the negotiation at Stanford had started before the prize came. I'm not sure about that. Someone ought to verify that point.

S: Anyway I see he dedicated his medal to the State Historical Society.

C: Yes. I remember that Elvehjem called me and asked me to do all I could to persuade Joshua to stay. He probably did the same thing with Van Potter and I know he himself tried. The University really hated to lose the best scientist that it had ever had.

S: That was a serious loss I guess.

C: Yes.

S: To get back to your work, you finally had your own lab. How heavy a teaching load did you have? Did it leave enough time to do research?

C: Yes it did. I had a heavier teaching load than most members of the College of Agriculture or Medical School do. But it's never been really heavy. And by the standards I had been used to at Dartmouth, this seemed like no teaching at all. I teach one course each semester and have done so ever since coming here. I was brought here to do that.

S: Oh, just one course?

C: Yes. A few times, it was two, plus seminars.

S: So it was a typical Ag College setup, wasn't it?

C: Of course teaching one course with 300 students in it is a big job.