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Reminiscences of Anthony J. Campo

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REMINISCENCES OF
Anthony J. Campo

ANNIVERSARY DINNER • APRIL 9, 1970

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The Rockefeller University

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Reminiscences of Anthony J. Campo

IT IS A SIGNAL HONOR for me to be asked to give a short talk on the anniversary of those who are retiring and those who have been with The Rockefeller University for more than 25, 40, or 50 years.

If you will humor me for a few minutes I would like to reminisce, if I may, on some fond memories during my 53 years here at Rockefeller.

Most of you know I came here as a boy of 14 in the spring of 1917, and soon afterward almost gave notice of leaving because of an incident that occurred. One of my duties was to go to various animal slaughter houses to collect blood for use in our laboratories. On my arrival at this particular slaughter house I was spotted by one of the attendants as a new green messenger boy, and was asked if I would like to see the "black sheep" leading the white lamb in from the pens. I had heard the expression but had never seen this, so I innocently answered Why not! After seeing what happened to the first lamb I woke up in one of the offices of the slaughter house with cold compresses being applied to my face. When I told my parents I was quitting, they advised me to have the attendant collect the blood in the future.

Little did I know then that I would be one of the fortunate few to remain with Rockefeller all this time.

During the first decade of the century our dollar volume of purchasing was in the tens of thousands, increasing to the hundred thousands in the second decade, partly because of World War I. It has continued to grow until last year we purchased over three million dollars of supplies and equipment.

Over the years I was privileged to work under four different heads of our institution. DR. SIMON FLEXNER, who encouraged me to finish my high school education at night. This took 5 years, 5 nights a week. Then, he urged me to go to college to get my degree

in pharmacy at Columbia, and permitted me to work here on a part time basis so that I could pay for my tuition. In large part I attribute my successful career here to kindnesses such as these. It made me proud when he affectionately called me his walking encyclopedia.

DR. HERBERT GASSER, who in spite of his heavy administrative work continued his scientific research on a limited basis. I shall never forget the enthusiasm and gratitude he expressed to me for getting him a goodly quantity of live northern pike (and they had to be 29 inches long) for work on the pike's olfactory nerves. This he told me later was his last research project.

DR. DETLEV W. BRONK, who for reasons known only to himself encouraged me to stay on and help the program of expansion going on at the University and to form a student pool of equipment and supplies for the graduate school. It was Dr. Bronk who initiated several employee morale boosters worth mentioning: planting an oasis in the heart of New York City, opening a sorely needed cafeteria, and, of course, instituting these anniversary dinners honoring us oldies.

DR. FREDERICK SEITZ, with whom I have worked these past two years and for whom I have a great admiration and respect.

I would like at this time to mention a few more highlights of my years at Rockefeller.

—Helping to get supplies and material for the Grenfell Expedition to Labrador.

—Assembling all necessary supplies and equipment for Dr. Hideyo Noguchi's expedition to South America and also his ill-fated expedition to Africa.

—Furnishing a multitude of supplies and equipment for the War Demonstration Hospital during World War I. The Hospital consisted of about seventeen prefabricated one-story buildings, including an administration building, wards for returning wounded, a pharmacy, an operating room, and laboratories. These were all located just south of our 66th Street drive and east of York Avenue. After the war in the early twenties The Rockefeller Foundation had

most of the buildings dismantled and—together with a vast amount of surgical instruments and other supplies—shipped to the Peking Union Medical College in China.

Through the early twenties, almost 75% of our laboratory glassware, equipment, microscopes, chemicals, and dyes were imported from Europe. We in Purchasing handled the importing and customs clearance and arranged for delivery to the Institute. However, in the late twenties and thirties American know-how forged ahead so rapidly that we were no longer dependent on foreign suppliers.

At the onset of our entry into World War II we helped The Rockefeller Foundation Virus Laboratories to set up facilities here for producing yellow fever vaccine. This was completed in the record time of six weeks and production of the vaccine started in about three months. The vaccine was furnished to our armed forces and to civilians where our forces were stationed.

We also assisted in the procurement of equipment and supplies for the Navy Medical Research Unit stationed on Guam in the Pacific and headed by our Dr. Thomas M. Rivers. And after the war we helped to equip a laboratory in Cairo, Egypt, for Dr. Richard M. Taylor. He was a former head of The Rockefeller Foundation Virus Laboratories.

An anecdote occurs to me at this time for which I am very proud and humble. A few years ago one of our senior faculty while visiting a medical school out West spoke briefly with one of our distinguished Rockefeller "alumni" who had been here 20 or 30 years ago. He asked if I was still at Rockefeller and, when told I was, said: "Rockefeller is one of the most unusual institutions in the world in terms of the concentration of talented individuals and productive laboratories; but do you realize that its most remarkable asset is neither a scientist nor a piece of equipment, but rather, the remarkable Tony Campo who keeps the place glued together. What I wouldn't do to have him here."

We in Purchasing are always ready to help not only those who go out from here, but also their associates in their new locations. We

receive inquiries for sources of supply and for specifications from our friends all over the world. We are unique at Rockefeller because we have a central Purchasing office which not only operates a large central stores, but maintains a vast catalogue system and keeps a record of all capital equipment.

Here are a few more things I am reminded of.

— Dr. Alfred E. Cohn telling me, about 40 years ago, not to believe anything I hear and darn little of what I see.

— Dr. John Northrop writing from California to say he is forced to order his supplies from us in New York, because he has to wait so long when he orders them from the University he is staying at, that he forgets what he ordered them for.

— Dr. Vincent Dole and others who have left to go to universities elsewhere and then longed to come back so that they could do research and not spend half their time finding out what is best to buy and where to get it from. Dr. Dole wrote me from Europe about the frustration and delays he encountered in getting supplies and equipment and asked me to remind him of this if he should ever gripe after he got back.

Among some of the odd items we have been asked to procure were: horse dander sweat and saliva; dwarf coconut seeds from South America; eggs of wild eagles and guinea hens; butterfly pupae in the diapause stage; and pregnant salamanders. One of the most exotic items requested of us was for 40,000 firefly tails. We contacted the appropriate officials on the island of Jamaica who turned us down because our request might extinguish the winking summer lights and hurt tourist trade.

In conclusion, let me say that I have been triply blessed with a tolerant and helpful wife, a wonderful family of five grown children, and a job which has been both challenging and rewarding and which I have loved in every aspect.

I indeed have been fortunate and am grateful to have contributed even in a miniscule way to advancing the effort here at Rockefeller.