

HANS ELIAS†

Hans Elias was an extremely energetic man. He worked hard at everything he did, whether it be scientific research, painting or sculpturing, teaching, or providing service to his profession and community. He always had multiple projects going simultaneously. His office was cluttered with books, paper, sketches, student papers, half-finished manuscripts, boxes of microscopic slides, and a host of other things. The clutter never seemed to bother him; instead, he would focus his attention on one beautiful thing and completely ignore the rest. In the tiny office I shared with him at the Chicago Medical School when it was located at 710 South Walcott Avenue in Chicago, there was one desk, two chairs, some cabinets and a sink. We shared the desk, and it was used for writing, microtomy, microscopy, photography, art work and lunch! There was one large window, and as far as I know it was never washed on the outside. The view was ghastly. We looked down on a small courtyard that faced the rear of the building. It was used to store old racks of animal cages, crates, and materials that eventually were hauled away. The office also was used as a dark room, so we had special black shades installed to make the window light tight. The black shade did little for the decor, so Hans decided to improve it. He bought a large piece of canvas which was nailed to the window frame, and on it he painted a beautiful picture. Regardless of how messy the office might be on a particular day, he always could lean back in his chair, focus his attention on the picture and marvel at the beauty of nature.

It was difficult to do photography in the office because so much light leaked under the door. We stuffed paper towels in the crack when we used the enlarger or developed our photomicrographs.

Hans always ate a big lunch, and it produced the expected postprandial dip. Later in his career when he had a larger office, he kept a folding lawn chair beside his desk. After lunch he would say, "Now it's time for a nap." He would unfold the chair, lie down on it, and promptly fall asleep. Ten minutes later he would get up and be ready for hard work.

Dr. Elias was very interested in minority and disadvantaged students. If given a choice, he always would hire a black technician or spend a little extra time with a black student. He had worked very hard under very trying conditions to achieve what he had, and he had a keen appreciation for others who had to struggle for success.

As a teacher he found great joy in making a student appreciate the beauty and complexity of nature. He always encouraged the students to draw what they saw in the microscope. He knew the exercise sharpened their powers of observation and helped them retain the information. When students would complain that they were unable to draw a straight line, he would patiently sit down and give them a lesson in art. He produced sketches on the backs of index cards and envelopes as well as on drawing boards, sketch pads and canvas.

(J.E. Pauly)