

Ryan

March 3, 1961

Dr. Victor Twitty  
Department of Biology  
Stanford University  
Palo Alto, California

Dear Victor,

Josh has asked whether I would write to you my thoughts regarding Ruth Sager's suitability for a position in your Department. This will be difficult to do because my remarks to be honest must be qualified, and yet I do not want you to overlook the opinion I qualify.

Ruth has been with me since 1955 and it is my plan to continue to have her appointed Research Associate until it does not suit one of us. I have thus far been very happy with her presence here, not only because she represents to my students another aspect of my field, but also because of the way she pursues her own research. Ruth's greatest virtue is her self-identification with her work; she is inseparable from her research and as a consequence it partakes of her virtues and her defects. She maintains a vigorous experimental program while holding a philosophical attitude about biological problems; her intelligence is at a very high level and her knowledge of and interest in biology is broad. These qualities foster and hamper her work at the same time. She is a good investigator and a useful participant in our seminars but her research is too scattered and ambitious for her industry, skill and enthusiasm to be readily apparent through her production.

There is no academic future for Ruth here at Columbia. She has forced our consideration of her candidacy on two occasions but the proposal was each time met by emphatic refusal on the part of our staff. Ruth seems to engender in others a feeling of respect rather than friendship. As a matter of fact, the students as well as the staff almost invariably dislike her. She seems unaware of this. Although she desperately wants affection, she does not know how to obtain it. She is a poor diplomat, transparent while practicing guile and capable of employing the crudest sort of force to obtain small advantages in the laboratory. Her behavior towards others is either saccharine or downright imperious and she usually succeeds in aggravating her associates with or without intending to do so.

Yet I like her. I suppose this is in part for the gratitude she sometimes shows me but mostly because of the sincere dedication with which she

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works. This may be a kind of selfishness, but I think it is socially useful. She is a good scientist and it seems a shame that her personality and character appear to have prevented her, (and not discrimination against women) from securing an academic post. Were she my peer in some department, I would anticipate aggravation but I believe this to be a healthy state of affairs. In the position she holds here, she certainly behaves as no dullard; rather she engenders plenty of intellectual life. Although I may sometimes disagree with her and even be angered, I do not want to see her leave us.

I want you to take these confidential remarks to mean that I recommend Ruth to you. At the same time, if you do not know her, I would not want you to discover later that you had employed a first-rate biologist whose agreeableness did not match her intellectual quality.

All best wishes.

Sincerely,

Francis J. Ryan  
Professor of Zoology

FJR/dr

cc: Dr. Joshua Lederberg ✓

Dear Josh

Congratulations on the A.H. award!  
Betty & I both look forward to see you  
& Esther. Could you have dinner with  
us one evening? Give our group an  
informal talk?

Yes, I am, as I've always been,  
an office boy - leading nobody  
anywhere.

Sincerely  
Francis