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My Summer Research Experience
Tufts Laboratory
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I had never worked in a lab before this summer. Naturally I was nervous. I worried that my naivety and lack of exposure would serve as a boundary between the professional staff of Dr Ana Soto's laboratory team and me, a sixteen year old high school student. Within the first five minutes that I spent in Jaharis 3 I was told numerous times that it was okay if I did not fully understand the experiments that were taking place in the lab. In fact, the entire research crew was willing and eager to answer all of the questions I had. I immediately felt comfortable because everyone was so friendly and warm. By my second day in the lab I had my photo-ID name tag made, I truly felt like part of the group. I knew that this was definitely an ideal setting for me to further explore my interest in the fight against breast cancer.

During my stay at the lab I attended two Tuesday lunch meetings. Each week, everyone in the lab met to discuss the week's findings and other points of interest. Although the lab is multifaceted, Tuesday lunches bring everyone together and up-to-date on the projects that are all being done simultaneously. As I quietly sat and listened in on the interesting discussions I became familiarized with the dynamics of the lab. The collaborative effort of the group was so evident. The same sense of community that I observed while taking in the intellectual conversations was what made me feel so comfortable as I worked alongside many different lab members.

While working with April, I learned that experiments do not always go as planned. She helped me to understand that it is even harder to isolate the variable that may have caused the unexpected results in the experiment. Nevertheless I was still able to see how Bisphenol-A affects the rate that cells proliferate because of prior studies completed by the lab many years before I arrived.

Perinaaz helped me to look at the research from an entirely different angle- she opened my eyes to the world of molecular studies. With her patience and guidance I ran a gel electrophoresis and successfully isolated a gene.

Laura taught me how to stain mammary gland tissues on slides and prepare them with cover slips. This enabled me to take part in one of the actual experiments going on in the lab. Once I learned the basic procedure I could prepare the slides without any assistance. This task allowed me to play a role in the current research work. I know that is something that most sixteen year old high school students cannot say they have taken part in.

Apart from the individual projects I did while at the lab, I also spent a lot of time talking with the researchers. It truly was a rare gift to participate in "behind the scenes research" on breast cancer. The opportunity to see what is being done to find a cure to this epidemic, and to learn where research grants go was one which I will never forget. To see the energy dedicated to the cause was nothing less than inspirational. This experience has reinforced some of my goals, and will go forward with me. I would fully endorse and recommend this program to anyone fortunate enough to have the same opportunity in the future.

