

Comments on Tihiro Ohkawa by Sumie Kobayashi

My introduction to Dr. Ohkawa was in June of 1960 when he visited Dr. Donald Kerst at General Atomics (GA) prior to his employment in September of that year. At the time, I was Secretary to Dr. Kerst. When Dr. Kerst left GA several years later and Dr. Ohkawa was named to head the experimentalists, I became his first secretary at GA.

In 1963 I left GA. Through the years Dr. Ohkawa pioneered in the fusion thermonuclear field and contributed greatly with his innovative ideas. He also achieved distinction with his organizational skills, rising from Fusion Staff Member to ultimately Sr. Vice President/Vice Chairman at GA. An American Institute of Physics interview by Stuart “Bill” Leslie of Dr. Ohkawa on May 23, 2006 gives an informative and interesting account of the path Dr. Ohkawa took to GA and all that transpired during his employment there, including international collaboration. See <https://www.aip.org/history-programs/niels-bohr-library/oral-histories/35130>.

Twenty years later in 1983, I became Dr. Ohkawa’s last secretary. He was then Vice President in Fusion and Advanced Technology. In all the years that I worked for him, he would start the day tending to administrative duties and thereafter would spend hours working on ideas. He trained himself to use whatever spare time he had—whether it was 15 minutes or an hour or more—to work on ideas. Even after interruptions of phone calls or visits by people, he had the discipline to go right back to whatever he was working on.

Although Dr. Ohkawa worked hard, he also enjoyed leisure get-togethers with the Fusion staff. Thus began the Fusion picnics which became an annual event. When he transferred to the Department of the President and was involved in advanced technologies, he had barbeques at his home for his staff.

Dr. Ohkawa was kind, never once raised his voice, and was always encouraging. He encouraged me to speak Japanese, especially when he had visitors from Japan. Working for Dr. Ohkawa was a privilege I enjoyed.

