

ASHI MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



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How long have you been an ASHI member? Over 16 years

Where was the ASHI meeting held the first time you attended? The first meeting I attended was in the early 2000s in Anaheim, CA. The keynote speaker was the US Acting Deputy Surgeon General who lost his wife in a car accident. Out of that tragedy, his family decided to donate her

organs and tissues to benefit 5 patients waiting for transplants. Four years later, his 20-year old daughter was hit by a car and died. This man's grief was unfathomable, but again he chose organ donation to honor his daughter's life. His daughter's gifts helped a mother of five children from Upstate New York who received her heart; a widow with four children who received her lung; a 59-year-old man, who received her liver; a widower with a daughter received her kidney; another father received the other kidney; and her corneas went to a 26-year-old man in Florida and a 60-year-old woman in Pennsylvania.* He talked about the need for organ donors and how it doubled in 4 years. He paid tribute to all the lab professionals who worked behind the scenes and made organ transplants possible. I felt so much empathy for Dr. Kenneth Moritsugu and it was then that I realized the field of HLA is more than just a "bread and butter" career for me. I knew that what HLA techs do behind closed doors matter and there is a face associated with the donor cells we test every single day. After that meeting I became an organ donor.

*Reference *Volume: 128 issue: 4, page(s): 245-246 Article first published online: July 1, 2013; Issue published: July 1, 2013*

What made you decide to work in HLA? I was a curious child growing up. As an adult, I describe myself as a life-long learner. If something fascinates me, I try and find out more about it. I am a Medical Technologist and a Generalist in the State of California. However, I have always preferred working in Blood Bank and Hematology (with Microbiology and Histopathology as my least preferred). I remember applying for a Blood Bank position in 2001 at Loma Linda Medical Center and during a panel interview with managers from different laboratory departments, the HLA manager, Linda Buckert asked me if I knew anything about HLA. My first initial thought was, great, my whole interview just went down the drain. What in the world is HLA? I mentally went through my college classes and tried recalling where I saw that acronym. My honest response was I don't know anything about HLA and what I knowledge I have, was based on a few pages in my school textbooks. I was curious about what the HLA department did. I answered by saying that on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 the highest, I am no perfectionist by any means), I was a 9 when it comes to learning new things. Little did I know, I was offered and accepted the HLA position and it changed my career path forever.

Most rewarding aspect: The most rewarding aspect of my work is the knowledge that I have made a difference in the clinical management of a patient's medical care. I grew up surrounded with family members in the medical profession. The majority of them see patients and handle their treatment, but they rely on our laboratory findings to make a diagnosis or manage the disease. What we do behind the microscopes, flow cytometers, sequence analyzers and computer analyses does make a difference. There's no greater feeling than being called at 2am to do a donor-recipient work-up and finding out later that the testing you performed resulted in a new kidney for the patient or an unusual transplantation where one received a heart-lung transplant while the person's existing heart was given to another patient. Or most recently, a highly sensitized patient needing HLA-matched platelets and coordinated transfusion support from across the country while she waited for a bone marrow transplant and is now transplanted and thriving.

The most significant aspect that my HLA work has brought me are the fascinating people I met along the way and have built multiple life-long friendships. From my first HLA lab family at Loma Linda where I spent my 15 years honing my skills with cherished individuals, to Stanford's HLA lab where I have had the opportunity to work among the best team in the industry to my current HLA team at American Red Cross that supports and encourages at all levels is very gratifying.

Fun fact: I love fiber arts. I like to knit, spin and dye my own yarns. People ask me why not buy yarns, I say where's the fun in that? There's a sense of accomplishment knowing you can grab a fleece from a sheep, process the wool, spin into yarns, dye with whatever colors you want and knit into a scarf. It's like a DNA fiber that transforms into another species.



**Benita Book, MS,MT(ASCP),CHT,CHS (ABHI),CRC (ACRP)
Research Associate, Supervisor, Transplant Lab
Retired**

Graduated from: Indiana University & Purdue University

How long have you been an ASHI member? 40 years

Where was the ASHI meeting held the first time you attended? My first meeting was in San Diego, but ASHI was known as AACHT in those days

What made you decide to work in HLA? It was new, exciting, and great variety. Something new came along every year.

Most rewarding aspect: I felt that I contributed to patient care.

Fun fact: I played on the Transplant intramural softball team called the "Whizz Kids".



Ingrid Perez-Alvarez, MD
Assistant Professor of Pathology
UC Irvine

Graduated from: University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, UCSD AP/CP Pathology Residency, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Transfusion Medicine Fellowship

How long have you been an ASHI member? 2 years

Where was the ASHI meeting held the first time you attended? My first ASHI meeting was in San Francisco in 2017.

What made you decide to work in HLA? While I was in High School my mother worked as a research associate with Dr. James Mathew at the University of Miami HLA Laboratory. I would spend nearly every afternoon and sometimes night with my mom while she worked on her research. I got to know well many of the staff at the UMiami HLA Lab. They shared their knowledge and love for the field with me as a wide eyed teenager. Later in medical school I spent time with Dr. Phillip Ruiz during my Transplant Surgery rotation in Medical School, also at the University of Miami. During my Pathology Residency I rotated with Dr. Gerald Morris at UCSD HLA Lab. After my Transfusion Medicine fellowship, one of my job opportunities was a position at UCI that would allow for training as an HLA Laboratory Director with Dr. Morris as my mentor, while also being a Transfusion Medicine attending. Jerry is an excellent and patient teacher, so I knew this was a fantastic opportunity. Transplantation is such an exciting field, so intertwined with Transfusion Medicine!

Most rewarding aspect: Knowing I am making a difference in the life of a human being out there.

Fun fact: I love mangoes. I don't like chocolate cake, cookies, or beets. I think strawberry ice cream is underrated. I love dancing, Caribbean poetry, and foreign films.