

# Presentation of the Southern Society for Clinical Investigation Founder's Medal to Dr. Manuel Martinez-Maldonado

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I want to begin this presentation with an appeal for your indulgence. Indulgence as I attempt to balance the restraints of truth with a recitation that will satisfy the desire of the recipient of this award for an heroic epic. His wife, I suspect, feels something closer to Don Quixote would be more appropriate. I've been told that Dr. Martinez requested I give this award because he felt after reading many of my papers that I had a real flair for fiction.

Manuel Martinez-Maldonado was born in Yauco, Puerto Rico in 1937. An only child, his early life was typical of the high performance attendant with that status. He graduated high school with high honors and magna cum laude from the University of Puerto Rico at the age of 19 after only three years as an undergraduate. He initially intended to make a career in literature. He studied with the Nobel laureate Ramon Jimenez, who was disappointed when Manny announced after his sophomore year that he was destined for medicine rather than letters. But as we shall see, this break was a trial separation instead of a divorce. Medical school was at Temple, medical residency at the University of Puerto Rico. Then the really interesting part of his life began. This, naturally, was about the time we met.

Dr. Martinez had decided that he wanted to be a nephrologist. He applied to a number of the best programs in the country. He was accepted by the Dallas nephrology division, which in the mid '60s was headed by Don Seldin and Floyd Rector. Dr. Seldin was then at the zenith of his collection of strays and weirdos that was to make his program the best in the country. Manny was just what Seldin was looking for, and vice versa. Seldin had never met a Puerto Rican and found Man-U-El incredibly exotic. Floyd, who is from Lubbock, thought anyone from east of Fort Worth a figure of romance, especially one who had read Cervantes in the original. Martinez for his part found the combi-

nation of Texas and Brooklyn, of chicken fried steak and constant hysteria metaphorically reminiscent of home.

When I emerged from the desert to become a renal fellow at Southwestern Medical School, Dr. Martinez had been in the renal lab for one year. My first day on the job, I was sent by one of the secretaries, who appeared to be making all administrative decisions for the department, to a small dark lab that looked like Nibelheim. About 20 barefoot figures were hunched over microscopes and other strange, to me at least, pieces of laboratory equipment. The exception was a short man who had a whip in one hand and a banana sandwich in the other. He was rushing around the place like a mouse on a hot plate, while issuing orders like a ticker tape. After a few minutes he put his hands on his hips and looked me over from head to toe—an inspection that so extended his neck that he lost his balance and fell against the wall.

Recovering, he said, "You the new man?"

"Yes sir," I replied. "I have a military background."

"You're over there." He pointed to a bare spot in the corner. "You'll do the microosmolalities." He gestured at a machine that looked like Edison's first phonograph. I spent the next week trying to measure the osmolality of 30 nl samples of proximal tubular fluid that were given to me by the other workers in the room. I could never get the machine to work. I wasn't told that no one had ever gotten that machine to work. I later discovered that Dr. Martinez had designed it following a nightmare induced by mixing plantains with Lone Star beer. You were supposed to stare into a monocular microscope that had "property of A van Leeuwenhoek" engraved on its barrel. It was taped to an orange crate; the crate had a pool of liquid nitrogen at its bottom. The idea was to put the sample of tubular urine close enough to the liquid nitrogen so that it gradually froze. When you saw the first crystal form you looked at a thermometer adjacent to the sample. The decrease in freezing point was converted to osmolality. The problem was that the sample froze instantly or that the crate filled with mist, reducing vision

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Dr. Manuel Martinez-Maldonado.

to zero. When I told the King of the Nibelungen of my inability to get the contraption to work, he told me that I should keep it to myself since everyone else in the lab had successfully used the machine and I wouldn't want to start my fellowship on the wrong foot.

A little later, despite his admonition, I complained to one of the lab technicians about the difficulty I was having. "I told Dr. Seldin that I couldn't get the osmometer to work. He said I should keep on trying."

"Dr. Seldin's been in Germany for the past two months," the technician said.

I went back to work. A little later I again complained to the same technician. "I told Dr. Rector that I couldn't get the osmometer to work. He said I should keep on trying."

The technician looked at me with even more pitying incredulity than he had the first time. "Dr. Rector doesn't work when the temperature has been above 85 anytime in the preceding 48 hours," he said. It was July in Dallas.

"Well then, who's that guy I've been working for?" I asked.

"That's Manny Martinez; he's a second year fellow."

"That's not Dr. Seldin?"

"No, but he's auditioning for the part."

"That's not Dr. Rector?"

"No, but he thinks he's his understudy."

Just then Dr. Martinez came by. "Kurtzman, when you finish doing the osmolalities, empty the garbage cans and turn out the lights."

"Manny, do you see that?" I said pointing to an adjacent elevator door. "If you give me another order, I'm going to throw you down that elevator shaft."

He looked up at me, this time putting a hand on the wall to preserve his balance, and concluded that the threat might be implemented.

"Okay," he said. "Let's eat lunch."

This established the basis for a friendship that has lasted without interruption for 25 years and which may even survive the presentation of this award.

Time does not allow me to dwell on the many fabulous occurrences that surrounded the remainder of Dr. Martinez's tenure in Dallas, both as fellow and as junior faculty member. But one event does require elaboration.

Dr. Martinez had discovered a natriuretic hormone. The implications of this discovery were so sensational that Dr. Rector had even showed up one day when the temperature was 92. Manny had conned everyone in the lab to drop what they were doing and start work on the hormone. Wadi Suki daily invented a new syndrome that the hormone could explain. He was able to diagnose diseases no one had yet contracted. Fred Coe was measuring the hormone's theoretical molecular weight using metaphysical spectroscopy. Jay Stein was investigating the interrelationship of the hormone and cigar smoke on proximal tubular function. I was performing blind assays of hormone activity on samples of plasma coded with the names of characters from Lope de Vega. We all thought they were the names of different varieties of fried bananas to which Dr. Martinez is still addicted. Alan Hull told everyone they should devote all their energy to the science of the problem because he would take care of any business considerations that might arise. We were all reassured by his willingness to shoulder this burden and we signed the stack of release forms he passed around. "Don't worry," he reassured, "everyone has a share." Only Jose Rodicio, from Spain, refused to participate. He remained aloof as a protest of Dr. Martinez's persistent refusal to lisp his C's.

Interest in the hormone was so widespread that visitors from the four points of the compass poured into the place. Some were even from outside of Texas. Dr. Martinez installed a big sign over the lab that said "LAB" so Drs. Seldin and Rector would know where to take the visitors.

Two problems arose. The first was publication. Whose name was to be first on the first paper—Rector or Martinez? Floyd had heard that the temperature in Stockholm never rose above 85 and therefore decided his name should be first. Manny, on the other hand, decided that even though the temperature never rose above 85 in Stockholm, he would be willing to bundle up and make the trip. Accordingly, his name had to be first. Dr. Seldin had to settle the issue. At first, he handled the problem like any other—he took a long trip. But eventually he had to decide: It was to be Rector, et al. Manny took the decision with his customary equanimity: He went berserk. After unsuccessfully threatening to set himself afire, he declared that Puerto Rico would secede, until he was reminded that the island wasn't in the union to begin with. But as usual, the world was too fascinating for him to remain in bondage to disappointment and he moved on to other fascinating things. The second problem, interestingly, solved the first. Mysteriously, the hormone went the way of the dodo, and et al wasn't such a bad place to be.

In 1968, Wadi Suki was appointed chief of nephrology at Baylor. He convinced Manny and Gary Eknayan to join him. They were the Manny, Moe, and Joe of American nephrology—an Arab, a Puerto Rican, and an Armenian. And they were world-beaters despite a three-figure decibel count wherever they went and bloody fights over whether to serve kibbe, fried plantains, or shish kebab at research conference. In five years, Dr. Martinez went from assistant to full professor of medicine. During this period, he published 39 original investigations in journals such as the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, the *American Journal of Physiology*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He studied the control of phosphate excretion, the role of the Na-K-ATPase on tubular transport, the treatment of ascites, and the control of urinary dilution and concentration. In short order he was elected to the American Society for Clinical Investigation and then the Association of American Physicians. He served as a member of the council of the National Institute of Arthritis, Metabolic, and Kidney Diseases. He served on study sections. He was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. His biography appeared in *Who's Who*. He was a member of the American Board of Internal Medicine. He was the president of this society. He became a *figura*.

I don't want to underestimate the significance of these accomplishments, but there are a lot of important people in medicine and as Dr. Seldin recently remarked, in 30 years no one will know who they were. Accordingly, I want to devote the remainder of this presentation to explaining why Dr. Martinez is the most interesting person I know, rather than telling you why he's such a big shot.

In 1973, with his wife Nivia and their children, he returned to his native country as Professor of Medicine at the University of Puerto Rico and Chief of the Medical Service at the San Juan VA. Nivia had entered Manny's life when he was a medical student in Philadelphia and she was in high school. She had dark hair and pale skin, a smile that could melt a diamond; she looked like Botticelli had painted her face on a cloud with a brush of dreams. Manny was hit with the thunderbolt; he has yet to recover. She was 17 when they married. Today she still looks like a Renaissance madonna, while Manny looks like Hieronymus Bosch rather than a Botticelli painting. They rapidly had three sons: Manny Jr., David, and Rickey. Eventually, Dr. Martinez found a way to harness his reproductive frenzy and no more children arrived until years later when their final son, Pablo, was born nine months after a visit to Venice during a full moon.

Back in Puerto Rico, Dr. Martinez hurled himself into the intellectual life of the island with the perpetual energy that erupts from him like a ballistic missile. New faculty were recruited, research programs started, and students gravitated to him like Bedouins to an oasis. His service was the medical fulcrum of the island. He organized domino games that regularly required riot control. He became interested in local politics.

Puerto Rican politics make those of Chicago, Louisiana, and Texas look demure. Dr. Martinez's politics make those of the rest of the island appear like the regularly scheduled meeting of the Peoria High School library committee. He repeatedly has explained the local situation to me, and finally I understand it. This realization occurred only after I discovered that he is passionately committed to Puerto Rican independence. Of course he is equally dedicated to the continuance of commonwealth status. He also devotes much of his time to campaigning for Puerto Rican statehood. Dr. Martinez is a man of many parts; they're not always standardized, however.

Dr. Martinez likes movies. That's not right, he's crazy about them. So not long after his return to the Caribbean he began to write movie reviews. He wrote them in Spanish and English. This allowed him to be infallible. His system was simple. If he raved about the picture in English, he deplored it in Spanish, and vice versa. He became the most feared critic in the latin world. If the film was in English, producers hurled blandishments and favors at him to ensure that the unfavorable review was in Spanish. If the movie was in Spanish, he was showered with green plantains from Bolivia, fried plantains from Honduras, plantains wrapped in tobacco leaves smuggled in from Cuba, and breaded plantains from El Yunque all to induce him to write the favorable revue in Castellano. His first year as a movie critic saw him gain 30 pounds. One of the high points of his life was the interview given him by Sonia Braga when she was promoting the "Kiss of the

Spider Woman." His disguise as a critic was so good she never realized he was a doctor. It was the only film he favorably reviewed in both languages.

Dr. Martinez's most intense passion, after his wife, is literature. While completely bilingual, the language of his crib is Spanish. When he thinks of beauty and delight, of sadness and melancholy he thinks in Spanish. His return to the Spanish speaking world resurrected his literary yearnings. They could not be stifled by medical school politics, by dominos on Saturday, by research grant deadlines, by private screenings of six new movies at a time, by visiting professorships throughout the old and the new worlds, not even by luscious Brazilian actresses who wanted him to write a good review. He resumed the composition of poetry and prose in the language of his cradle. He thus far has produced three volumes of poetry and a novel. His criticism now encompasses literature as well as films. He thinks and writes about "Love, Death, and Numbers in Garcia Marquez."

He started to travel in literary circles. When he went to Mexico City, he had to see Octavio Paz. In Argentina, he lectured Maria Kodama Borges, the great writer's widow, on the blurring of the boundaries between prose and poetry in *El libro de los seres imaginarios*. He explained to Vargas Llosa the true relationship between a creative work and its inspiration. Vargas Llosa said after hearing Manny's exegesis that he finally understood what *La tia Julia y el escritor* was all about. He was received by Aleixandre. He was now a man of letters.

Now this is all pretty heady stuff. But the cosmos is never impressed and neither is his family. At home not even his dog responds when he calls. To the world he is *El tigre*, domestically he is *El conejito*.

A few years ago, my wife and I visited Puerto Rico accompanied by 12 cameras and 120 rolls of film. The plan was for us to drive around the island with Manny and Nivia taking pictures that would illustrate a text by Manny. We naively planned to submit a manuscript to the National Geographic that would truly portray the essence of the island's unique culture. What happened was far more interesting than anything in the National Geographic.

To start, Manny decided to bring his entire family along. He is related to three quarters of the island's population. When we were all on the road our caravan stretched from San Juan to Fajardo, which presented another problem—our first stop was the radio telescope in Arecibo in the exact opposite direction. But that problem was solved when we arrived at Arecibo on the one day of the year it is closed. We continued west toward Cabo Rojo.

On the way, we were struck by the dread Puerto Rican turista, or at least one of us was—Dr. Martinez. With Manny incapacitated, the driving of our command car was delegated to Rickey Martinez, whose

previous experience behind a wheel was restricted to a golf cart. Nivia predicted disaster, Manny said everything would be okay. Thirty seconds later we collided with a 1957 Chevrolet that contained the other one quarter of the population not related to the Martinezes. The driver of the car may not have been related to Manny, but he was the cousin of the local sheriff.

Rickey was hauled off to jail in Cabo Rojo despite Manny's protests that he knew Aleixandre, Vargas-Llosa, and Don Seldin. A decade later the case is still in court. Manny appears weekly before the local judge. One of the main reasons he recently moved to Atlanta was that it's easier to get to Cabo Rojo from there than it is from San Juan.

When Rickey was bailed out, we continued on our way. Dr. Martinez made sure we saw all the important landmarks of the region. We spent the bulk of our time in Yauco, the village of his birth, which he assured me was the cultural center of the commonwealth. We visited the house where he was born, the grade school he attended, and the store from which he got his first pair of long pants. The rest of the region was allotted 30 seconds per attraction. But at least he took us to the most picturesque restaurants and hotels in the area. You must understand that Dr. Martinez confines the extravagance in his life to his life, not to his choice of food and lodgings.

Having exhausted the attractions of the extreme western part of the island, we headed for Ponce. Manny herded us out of town after we had seen the fire station, but nothing else. We had to be in Fajardo by night fall. One of Manny's resident's family had a condominium there. He had terrorized the resident into allowing all 250 of us to stay in this two bedroom condo. Shortly after we arrived, Manny learned that his 96-year-old aunt had died. The death was not unexpected, but Manny had to return to San Juan to take the women of the family to the funeral. Where? Cabo Rojo.

So we all went back to San Juan. Ten minutes after we arrived back at Casa Martinez, Manny remembered he had turned off the refrigerator in the condo in Fajardo; the refrigerator was full of food. Why he had turned off the refrigerator was unexplained. No one had known him to turn off any refrigerator in the past. Back he went to Fajardo—two-and-a-half hours each way. Finally he was off to Cabo Rojo with his wife, his mother, and an aunt. He borrowed his neighbor's van to make the journey—the kind with giant ribbed snow tires that are so useful in Puerto Rico.

By now you probably realize that no journey undertaken by Dr. Martinez is without event. So it was with this one. On the way back to San Juan from Cabo Rojo one of the snow tires blew out. The expansion of women's rights has even reached the macho coast of Puerto Rico, but it will never extend to changing a snow tire on top of Cerro de Punta in the dark. He had to change the tire himself with-

out a flashlight. It was an heroic struggle. When he finally got his party back to San Juan, his successful encounter with the blown out snow tire had become a fight against the mountain giants known to dwell on top of Cerro de Punta. Manny announced his intention to compose a 1000-line epic entirely in alexandrine verse describing his battle against the mountain trolls.

As I hope I have made you realize, Dr. Martinez is a kaleidoscope of contradictions and fascinations. He is a man of science. He is an incorrigible romantic—the last survivor of 16th century Spain. He is convinced he fought next to Cervantes at Lepanto. Passionate in argument, he cannot hold a grudge. Quick to take offense, he is quicker to forgive. Who else intends to read everything in all the CDNA libraries in all the laboratories of the world as well as the complete works of Lope de Vega, Balzac, and Woody Allen? Continuously

overwhelmed by minor adversity, he satisfies Hemingway's definition of courage—grace under pressure. He is the only man I know fluent in English who reads Huckleberry Finn in Spanish. He is a chimera of charm and intellect, of wisdom and romance, of energy and contemplation. He is never bored and he is never boring.

When I told him that all nephrologists, with the possible exception of Bob Schrier, were crazy, he looked at me with infantile wonder and said, "Even me?" He is in color while the rest of us are in black and white.

Though a scientist, poet, critic, peerless teacher, world traveler in need of a dozen St. Christopher medals, just being Manuel Martinez-Maldonado appears to be sufficient reason to award him the Founder's Medal of the Southern Society for Clinical Investigation, which I now present to him.

The Southern Society for Clinical Investigation has established the Tinsley-Harrison Award, given by the University of Alabama at Birmingham in memory of Tinsley Randolph Harrison, one of the founders of the SSCI.

The award, given to the author of the best single manuscript published in *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* during the year, was presented at the recent Southern Clinical Research Meetings

To: Tjerk W. A. deBruin, M.D., Ph.D.  
Instructor in Medicine  
Utrecht University Hospital  
Utrecht, The Netherlands

For: "Heterogeneity of TSH Receptor-Binding Antibodies in Hashimoto's Thyroiditis and Graves' Disease"

The Merck, Sharp and Dohme Young Investigator Awards were presented to the following individuals at the recent Southern Society for Clinical Investigation Meeting:

John I. Jones, M.D.  
Fellow in Endocrinology  
University of North Carolina  
School of Medicine

"The Bioactivity of an Insulin-like Growth Factor Binding Protein is Modulated by Serine Phosphorylation"

Yutaro Shiota, M.D., Ph.D.  
Instructor of Medicine  
University of Mississippi  
School of Medicine

"Upmodulation of Homing Receptors in Hemopoietic Stem Cells Requires Protein Synthesis and Recycling"

Daniel A. Polansky, M.D.  
Research Fellow in Hematology/Oncology  
University of Alabama at Birmingham  
School of Medicine

"Selective Inhibition of c-myc Expression Prevents Smooth Muscle Proliferation in Response to Serum"