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32nd President of the International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery

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The greater the obstacle, the more glory in over-coming it. (J. B. Moliere)

When you think about it, Moliere's phrase quoted by Enrique Ventureyra likely served as his personal creed for his postgraduate education and career development. But it also must be the force that drives all neurosurgeons in their quest to relieve human suffering. Enrique is a before CT scan (*BC*) Surgeon who, like his peers at the dawn of his career, met the "obstacles" of nervous system disease via a clinical history and detailed examination that plumbed the dysfunctional neurons, and then delved into the depths of one's teachings and instinct to affect a correcting solution.

The "glory" was realized on September 13, 2005 when Enrique delivered his International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery (ISPN) presidential address, in Vancouver, BC, Canada. His presidency was unique to that of his predecessors, beginning a year earlier when during the 2004 meeting in Buenos Aires he received the poncho that symbolizes the presidential office. The poncho had its roots in his home country of Argentina as a consequence of a vigorous discussion in 1973 between Raul Carrea and Tony Raimondi about their personal garments. Raimondi



described his Columbian "ruana" (or poncho) that was a solid woolen plaid with a slit for the head. Not to be outdone, Carrea defended the elegant and delicate Argentinean poncho and promised to bring one to Raimondi in Chicago. He did so a year later and it was tucked away for "future use" [1]. After Carrea's untimely death in 1978, Raimondi presented the Argentinean poncho to the Society the following year as a tribute to Carrea's memory. At that point, the poncho's skirts had been embroidered with the names of all the ISPN presidents from Jacques Rougerie to Raul Carrea. It was Raimondi's request that the poncho thereafter be annually passed from one president to the next to impart solemnity

and add depth to the office. When Enrique opened the Society's 2005 Canadian meeting, it became apparent that no previous ISPN president was so fortunate to receive the Argentinean poncho in his *birth* country, and a year later, preside over the annual meeting, deliver his presidential address, and advance the poncho in his "adopted" country!

La Plata, Argentina

This major city, about 60 km south of Buenos Aires and the capital of Buenos Aires province, lies on the southern shore of the Rio de La Plata estuary. Originally the city's plan was modeled on that of Washington, DC. La Plata's architectural features include a museum connected with the National University of La Plata, (Enrique's alma mater), the municipal library, and a Gothic style cathedral that were included with government buildings in the original construction. Railroads and highways connect the city's outport facilities, which in turn is reliant upon a large deepwater artificial harbor. (This contrasts with Ottawa and its picturesque Rideau Canal that circles around the country's Parliament Buildings and provides wonderful ice skating in the winter, but otherwise, has no resemblance to a deepwater port!)

Enrique was born in La Plata during September, 1946. A lawyer's son, he examined his postsecondary educational options that included an opportunity to enter the country's Military School of Aviation. But chance intervened when he read a book penned by a Hungarian author who recounted his experience as a surgical patient. As a result, Enrique was determined that he would become a physician. He entered medical school in his hometown university in 1964 and received his M.D. degree 6 years later. While at school he was accepted as a summer student to work with Professor Cesar Burry, a distinguished local neurosurgeon. Enrique was inspired by Burry who subsequently became his role model and the catalyst for the direction of his professional career. Unfortunately, there was no neurosurgical postgraduate training program in La Plata. Hence, he

"began looking for other training opportunities" [2].

Off to Chicago

Influenced by Professor Burry and a fellow student who was about to set off for America to study neurosurgery, the newlywed Ventureyras, Enrique and Mariel, marshaled their plans for a journey north of the equator for a 1 year's appointment at the Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. By the time they left South America in the summer of 1971, Enrique recalled,

"At that point our Great Adventure was about to begin. At the time of our departure our belongings were one

suit case each, one-way tickets, \$800.00 and our dreams!" [2]

Armed with his Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates diploma, Enrique nevertheless found that in Chicago the best "teachers" of English were "patients, fellow American interns and television." During his second month's assignment to the hospital's very busy neurosurgical service, he recognized and said that

"I did not have sufficient command of the English language to function properly. One day I went on rounds with one of the senior neurosurgeons and he did not stop talking. Very politely I kept saying, "Yes sir, Yes sir," but I did not understand what he was talking about! Two days latter I received a telephone call from the very angry and frustrated attending, because when he showed up at the OR desk that day, there were no cases booked for him. Then I realized what he had been talking about on rounds the previous day" [2].

Toward the end of his rotating surgical internship, Enrique was being seriously beckoned by his mistress, neurosurgery. As the Michael Reese Hospital did not have an approved training program at that time, he sought out alternatives, one in particular after a clinical event, he said,

"We admitted a 70-year-old lady with a brain tumour located in the left parietal lobe. This tumour was confirmed by cerebral angiography. A glioblastoma was suspected and a tumour biopsy was offered to the patient. Unsure about this course of action, the patient's family requested a second neurosurgical opinion with Professor Paul Bucy from Northwestern University. The attending neurosurgeon asked me to present the case to Professor Bucy and also suggested that I seize the opportunity at the end of the consultation to ask [him] for a job in his neurosurgery training program at Northwestern" [2].

Paul Bucy had been Professor of Surgery (Neurosurgery) at Northwestern University in Chicago since 1954 [3]. In 1968, he prevailed upon Anthony Raimondi to return to the Children's Memorial Hospital as its Chairman of Pediatric Neurosurgery [4] where Raimondi, earlier in the decade, had a brief association in what would now be likely regarded as fellowship experience.

Perhaps Professor Bucy was planning his own exit strategies in 1972 (the year that he retired) when he offered advice to Enrique who had approached him about a training opportunity. Bucy inquired of Enrique's professional connections in Buenos Aires and the future practice opportunities there for a young man. A letter of commitment from Argentina was requested by Bucy. It was not

forthcoming and Enrique realized that he had to seek out other avenues for neurosurgical instruction.

Books and the Hungarian influences

Books and two Hungarians had a significant impact on Enrique's professional choices and ultimately, his Canadian career. Frigyes Karinthy was considered as the most popular of the twentieth century Hungarian authors who produced plays, poems, short stories, novels, newspaper articles, and parodies. His book *A Journey Round My Skull* [5] was an autobiographical account of his own tribulations with a brain tumor, an acoustic neuroma. Karinthy was operated under local anesthesia by Professor Herbert Axel Olivecrona just a year after he had assumed the Chair of Neurosurgery, reputedly the first in Europe, at the Karolinska Institutet in 1935. The tumor was successfully excised. Regrettably, 2 years after completing his book, Karinthy died at age 51 years. But his influence and no doubt Olivecrona's skills had touched Enrique's life. He said,

“I saw Olivecrona in action and imagined myself performing neurosurgery. After finishing reading the book I was inspired and certain that neurosurgery was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life” [2].

Leslie P. Ivan, Emeritus Professor at the University of Ottawa, ISPN member, and senior author of the book, *The Pediatric Neurosurgical Patient: a Cooperative Approach*, follows up with a commentary that in hindsight connects the dots (L. P. Ivan, personal communication). Frigyes Karinthy's tumor diagnosis was made by Kálmán von Sántha a young neurologist in Budapest. At the time, he was about to leave for Canada to study neurosurgery at the Montreal Neurological Institute. Upon completion of training there, Sántha returned home to Hungary and became Professor of Neurology in Debrecen at Leslie Ivan's alma mater. He recalls that

“The Canadian experience introduced Sántha to the work of Stephen Leacock, and then to me through the brilliant translation of Leacock into Hungarian by Karinthy. Little did we know that a Hungarian author and the Canadian opportunity would ultimately connect us all”. (L. P. Ivan, personal communication)

Onward beyond the US/Canadian border

Life is what happens to you when you are planning something else. In the early winter of 1972, Enrique was disappointed by his inability to secure a neurosurgical training position in the Chicago area. He contemplated returning to Argentina. Then, another local neurosurgeon offered a suggestion. Consider applying to American and

Canadian neurology postgraduate programs as a possible entrée to future neurosurgery training. He took the advice and a while later, was offered a residency position in the neurology division at the University of Ottawa. How fortuitous it was at the time for Enrique may have been unaware that the training programs in neurosurgery under the stewardship of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada required a 6-month experience on a clinical neurology service at a university hospital. He also could not have known then that Canada was founded and sustained by immigration. The stage was set for an enchanted reader of Frigyes Karinthy to continue his voyage from La Plata to meet Dr. Leslie Ivan in Ottawa.

In the early 1970s, the neurosurgery program in Ottawa was in its formative days and was being organized by Dr. Ivan. With respect to Enrique's arrival and progress he comments,

“I have no recollection of how the training committee chose him; he proved an industrious and reliable young doctor. Though inexperienced, he was intelligent, helpful and dedicated as a resident. [He had] insatiable interest in new developments [and] brilliance in diagnostic workup”. (L. P. Ivan, personal communication)

By virtue of his earlier surgical rotations and experience in neurology, Enrique required only three additional years of neurosurgery residency to satisfy the Canadian credentialing process. In 1976, distinction had at last endowed him not only as a specialist certificate holder of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, but also as the first graduate from the University of Ottawa's neurosurgical program. Fellowship exposure was the next step. He traveled down the road to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children and additional experience with the “3Hs” (Bruce Hendrick, Harold Hoffman, and Robin Humphreys). He said such experience

“immersed me in the world of pediatric neurosurgery, which stimulated and influenced my future in this field” [2].

CHEO

When Leslie Ivan offered Enrique the opportunity to join him in pediatric neurosurgical practice at the 2-year-old Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa, (referred to as CHEO), Enrique

“was confronted with the dilemma of having to choose between the opportunity to develop a pediatric neurosurgery career at CHEO, which presumably offered a secure future, against a clinical [adult] fellowship in microneurosurgery.

I decided to pursue the pediatric neurosurgery opportunity, which up to that moment had never crossed my mind. Two full-time pediatric neurosurgeons were required to organize and run the new neurosurgery unit” [2].

The average winter temperatures in La Plata, Argentina vary from 8–12°C. Snow is unheard of. Enrique had little contact with the fluffy white crystals during some rare times off while in Chicago, but he couldn’t have known about the amount of snow that decorates Ottawa each year. Welcome to Canada!

Why pediatric neurosurgery?

It is almost pro forma now that a candidate is asked the “why” question when seeking a position as a fellow at a major pediatric neurosurgery facility. The responses may be creative but the “children” word is typically front and center. Enrique, now considerably distanced from his fellowship time, explained his why belief while at the ISPN podium in 2005. He illustrated it with the story of “Lucy” for which so many of us have parallel experiences. Enrique operated upon Lucy for bilateral moyamoya syndrome when she was 14 years old. She recovered from her original neurological deficits and both cerebral hemispheres showed satisfactory revascularization on follow-up imaging. “Graduation” from a children’s hospital in Canada typically occurs when the patient reaches age 18 years. Thus, Lucy disappeared from Enrique’s office. Fifteen years later, while dining at a local Italian restaurant, Enrique’s server recognized his name on his credit card. She was Lucy, now

“a healthy, productive adult [who] had achieved the ultimate goal of pediatric neurosurgery” [2].

In summary, he elaborated,

“I was confronted with very complex and challenging pathology from the start. My passion for pediatric neurosurgery and my dedication to the affairs of this Society brought me to this position and to this podium today. Through this Society I had the unique opportunity to become part of the evolution of pediatric neurosurgery internationally. I have tremendously enjoyed all these years. I feel extremely privileged to have been able to help so many children and their families [and the rewards from] and stories during my career” [2].

The international citizen

In the mid-1960s our forefathers took steps to assign identity to their craft. Organized pediatric neurosurgery

was about to move beyond discovering one another and exchanging visits [6]. Surgeons were hungry for more information that was detailed, objective, and also new and innovative concerning their areas of interest. They also sought some measure of comfort from listening to the experiences that the more senior and wise colleagues shared with them. Specialty organizations resulted.

If it had not occurred to anyone before, the international character of pediatric neurosurgery and its grandfathers, some of whose names were quite familiar across the seas, began to coalesce their pursuits by 1970. In the autumn of 1971, Jacques Rougerie hosted a meeting in Paris from which the concept of an international organization had gained momentum. The International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery was created in 1972 [7]. Its first meeting was hosted by Satoshi Matsumoto in Tokyo in 1973 and was presided over by Jacques Rougerie, president; Anthony Raimondi, secretary; and Bruce Hendrick, the treasurer. During the next three decades, the ISPN has devoted itself and its academic events to the various subjects pertaining to the research, diagnosis, and care of surgical lesions residing within the child’s nervous system.

Born in Argentina, educated there as well as in America and Canada, and fluent in Spanish and English and also speaking some French, Enrique is an ideal fit into the international role of the ISPN. He was a vigorous participant during his academic missions to several countries—Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, England, France, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Monaco, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. His loyalty to this organization is manifest by his attendance since 1979 at all but two of the annual meetings. He has more than fulfilled our ISPN grandfathers’ dream; he has worked on the Society’s education, scientific and bylaws committees, was the annual meeting chairman (Ottawa, 1996), secretary (1999–2003), and president-elect (2003) leading up to his presidency.

The afterlife

Enrique and Mariel Ventureyra waited in front of the Westin Bayshore Hotel for a taxi on the afternoon of September 16, 2005. They had a flight back to Ottawa. The week, all too brief, was over. Their memories of those 7 days will last forever. Enrique was returning to Ottawa and his continuing responsibilities as chief of the Division of Neurosurgery at CHEO, Professor at Department of Surgery, University of Ottawa, and Geographic Editor (Canada) of *Child’s Nervous System*. However, another plan was developing. Early in 2006, the Ventureyras departed for an enviable sabbatical in Europe. They arrived in France where they will spend time with their daughter, Valerie Astrid who holds a degree from the University of Paris and lives there, and visit other places. Meanwhile,

their son Scott Derek, an economics graduate from the University of Ottawa, will be keeping the Ventureyra flavor alive in Ottawa during his parents' absence.

One suspects that a brief excursion to Hungary will be recorded in their travel diary.

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