

Professor Manuel González Sierra

A Tribute



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Professor Manuel González Sierra, Manuel as he is known nationwide in the organic community, was born in March 30, 1945 in Intriago, a small village close to Covadonga and the Peaks of Europe National Park in Asturias, Spain.

At a very young age he and his family left this beautiful landscape to emigrate to Argentina. They settled down in Mar del Plata, a city with famous beaches and an important harbor at the Atlantic Ocean, where he spent his childhood and went to school. The magnificence of this marine environment together with the fact that he grew up in the heart of an immigrant family have been probably decisive elements that forged his adventurous spirit during the whole of his life.

Manuel moved to La Plata to study chemistry at the La Plata National University. In 1969, before finishing his undergraduate studies, he got in contact with Dr. Edmundo Rúveda, at that time a young professor at Buenos Aires University and he joined his group as soon as he got his degree in chemistry. He enrolled in a Ph.D. program during the turbulent decade of the seventies in our country, even though those adverse circumstances were not an obstacle to pursue his Ph.D. degree.

When the universities became the center of the turmoil and political changes, he went to work in the pharmaceutical industry but after a couple of years he was missing the flavor of the academic environment and decided to return to academia. He took a postdoctoral appointment at the University of Kansas with a fellowship from the National Institute of Health and later at the Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences (RIPS) at the University of Mississippi under the supervision of Professor James McChesney.

At the beginning of the 80's, while still in the USA, he accepted the challenge posed by Prof. Rúveda, who was in those years teaching in Brazil, to return to Argentina and join him in the formation of a research institute in organic synthesis in the School of Pharmaceutical and Biochemical Sciences at the recently created Rosario National University, where there were no research groups in organic, inorganic or analytical chemistry.

I first met Manuel during a winter course that he co-organized in Rosario in July 1981. As I had received my degree from a different university I knew nobody on the course, or any of the organizers. During the first coffee break, I saw a very helpful person serving coffee to everybody and taking care of all the details with the participants. Eight months later, this gentle man became my Ph.D. advisor.

Throughout all the years since then, I have witnessed his active participation in shaping the way chemical research and teaching were done at the School of Biochemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences and in the newly created Institute of Synthetic Organic Chemistry. By the end of 1981, the first NMR equipment arrived at the School and it was the starting point for his lasting dedication to maintain and run the NMR facility, work that he continues nowadays even after been appointed Director of the Institute. In this endeavor he always found ingenious solutions to our lack of technical assistance and/or financial support to keep the NMR equipments working.

In 1986 he was a visiting scholar at the Rhur Universitat in Bochum, Germany through a Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) fellowship program in the field of NMR spectroscopy.

During his academic career he has served in positions ranging from teaching assistant to full professor and developed a wide range of research interests from natural products and phytochemistry through, organic synthesis, medicinal chemistry, NMR spectroscopy.

His accomplishments in NMR spectroscopy deserve special recognition, due to his unselfish work within the organic chemistry community not only locally but also around the country. He is always ready to help anybody who needs to solve a spectroscopic problem without claiming any credit at all. He does it for the pleasure of solving problems and helping people, an altruist attitude that makes him a very special person.

He has been actively involved during all these years in the academic life of the School, serving as member of its Executive Council, Chair of the Organic Chemistry Department and since 2003 as Director of the Institute of Synthetic Organic Chemistry, recently renamed as the Rosario Institute of Chemistry. As Head of the Graduate School, he played a crucial role in implementing the present Ph.D. programs in Chemical and Biological Sciences. He has also

served a term as Vice-president and another term as President of the Argentine Research Society in Organic Chemistry.

Although he spent a short period working in industry, it was more than enough to gain peer recognition and in 1978 he was awarded the Prize Dr. R. Ymaz from the Argentine Society of Pharmacology and Therapeutics. In 2003 he received the Merit Diploma from the KONEX Foundation as the most representative personality in Science and Technology (discipline Organic Chemistry), a prize awarded every ten years to a scientist, for outstanding contributions in the field. He has produced more than 80 original scientific publications and many of his graduate students are now making contributions in the fields of organic and medicinal chemistry, analytical chemistry and also biophysics.

Besides his deep knowledge of chemistry, Manuel is a real expert on wines and can thoroughly describe all the characteristics of any drop of good wine that touches his lips. He is also well known for his cooking abilities; anybody who visits him has the chance to enjoy wonderful meals prepared in a haute cuisine style with great passion.

In addition to his scientific qualities and leadership, he is blessed with a fine personality, he has always been a good counselor in all aspects of life for his graduate and undergraduate students. I have greatly enjoyed my scientific interaction with him during the past 29 years and it is a great pleasure and a real honor for me to write this tribute.

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