

ONE VOTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE: The 1965 SPMA Conference in Cebu

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In January 1965, thirteen UPCM students represented the College at the Student Philippine Medical Association (SPMA) convention held in Cebu City. The contingent consisted of Class '65 members Quasi Romualdez, Seg Danao, Ato Roxas and Nonoy Dominguez; Class '66 members Dido Feliciano, Ernie Arandia and Bong Vicencio; and Class '67 members Norma Camesa, Connie Somera, Lani Vicencio, Lina de la Cruz, Biboy Fernandez and myself. Lina was the UPCM SPMA muse. Roger Castillo of Class '64 who was an Instructor in the Department of Psychiatry, went as our adviser.



UPCM Delegation at the Fernandez Residence

We, along with some delegates from UE and UST flew on a PAL *Maya* plane. The plane was rickety and I thought, was able to fly only because it was so light in weight that it was held aloft (but then also often buffeted) by the winds. *Caduceans* band member Bong Vicencio's presence along with his guitar, stimulated a lot of singing from our group, coming and going in both airports (mostly folk with occasional rock songs), much to the envy of the extroverted delegates from the other Manila schools, some of whom sought to join us. After our arrival in Cebu, Biboy and Lani showed us around the city and entertained us in their homes. Biboy's parents, Drs. Andres and Ramona Fernandez '38 proudly hosted a sumptuous luncheon for us. We felt quite privileged!



As an indication of how times have changed, only six medical colleges composed the SPMA at that time: UP, UE, UST, MCU, FEU and Southwestern University. Soon after our arrival, the first order of business was to consider the membership application of Cebu Institute of Technology. There was little doubt that this would pass since CIT, along with SWU served as the hosts of the conference and they paid attention to every little detail, helping ensure that the *Manileños* felt welcome. Their application was approved unanimously. There was a serious but short-lived attempt by the UST delegation to not allow CIT to vote in the about to be held election of national officers (*for reasons that would be obvious later*) but this went down in defeat.

The next days of serious deliberations produced discussions of health issues in the Philippines (there were of course many) and how medical students could have a voice in steering governmental policy. Suggestions were formulated that pending approval by the body of delegates, would be sent to the Philippine Medical Association and the Department of Health. But all of these deliberations were merely a preamble to the main event of the conference: the impending election of national officers. None of our more senior companions were interested in running for President. However, two delegates from other schools were campaigning furiously for the office from day one: UST's Salvador Duque, son of then Pangasinan governor and ex Secretary of Health Francisco Duque, Jr. and FEU's Roland Limosnero. The two were locked in an intense battle for votes. Each college had thirteen voting members. With so many other delegates to approach for votes, we were initially perplexed as to why our delegation seemed to be the epicenter of attention of both candidates. We soon found out why: Duque had locked up the support of the delegations from UE, MCU and of course UST while Limosnero had FEU, SWU and CIT committed to his side. The delegations from those schools had agreed to vote as a bloc in support of their candidate. This meant that the two were dead even in votes and that the swing delegation was UP! Salvador Duque was more seasoned at the political craft, perhaps gained from experiences campaigning for his father in Pangasinan. He was a person of wealth, a smooth talker, and had a grand vision for making the SPMA more dynamic and relevant to medical education and health care especially of the poor. Occasionally though, he came on too strong and turned people off. Roland Limosnero was more reserved and one on one, never articulated his vision for SPMA to us, but it is also likely that we never gave him a chance. We sought guidance from our Class '65 elders as to which candidate to support. It was clear that we could get any concession we wanted from either candidate. However, our elders could not make up their minds either. Some thoughts that were entertained included Biboy's suggestion of abstaining from voting as a group, or dividing our votes for each candidate equally so as not to affect the outcome. (The latter suggestion would have necessitated an abstention from one of us). Both ideas remained in consideration by the group.

Election Day arrived. As the grand meeting started, Salvador Duque couldn't wait to be recognized on the floor and upon being called upon, proceeded to nominate classmate Norma Camesa to be National SPMA Secretary-Treasurer. Norma had made her presence known at this convention with her active participation in discussions. Many of her suggestions made it to the final documents. Not to be outdone, Roland Limosnero quickly jumped to his feet to second the nomination. As a consequence, Norma was unanimously elected to the position *by acclamation!*

Subsequently, Duque and Limosnero were nominated for President. They both gave prepared speeches telling the audience why they deserved to be elected President of the organization. Just before the voting by secret ballot began, Quasi Romualdez approached all of us with the advice to just vote our conscience. Unlike the other schools, the UPCM delegation would not be voting as a bloc. I personally voted for Salvador Duque, thinking that with his paternal connection he could, with little effort, put SPMA on the map.

Finally came the canvassing of the votes. It was truly neck and neck! No one knew the outcome since we were unaware of how each of us voted. When the final tally of votes came, Duque had won by one vote, 46-45! The UPCM delegation, without consulting each other, had voted 7-6 in favor of Duque! The newly victorious SPMA President-elect, broadly smiling and relieved, approached our group soon after and said, "Thank you! I don't know how you did it, but I do know that I couldn't have won without your support!" He looked at Norma and they both had a good laugh about having to tolerate each other for the coming year.

According to a study of state and federal elections in the USA between 1898 and 1992, one of every 200,000 votes cast in USA elections and one of every 15,000 votes cast in state elections *mattered* in the sense that they were cast for a candidate that officially tied or won by one vote. For the UPCM delegation, we knew going in that each of our votes truly mattered in this election! Thinking back, I am just happy that no Duque voter among us abstained. Otherwise, who knew what chaos could have erupted in the aftermath!

Epilogue:

Dr. Roland Limosnero specialized in Psychiatry and is currently still in active practice in Morris Plains, New Jersey. Previous to this, in addition to being in active practice, he was employed part-time as one of two psychiatrists by Somerset County, New Jersey (the other psychiatrist was the wife of a junior faculty member in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at Rutgers which is how I first became aware that he settled in New Jersey).

Dr. Salvador Duque became the President of their family owned institution, Lyceum-Northwestern University in Dagupan City that since the late seventies, has boasted having a medical school. He was active in public service as well, founding the Metro-Dagupan Construction Earthquake Rehabilitation Foundation that helped rehabilitate Dagupan City following the destructive earthquake that occurred on July 16, 1990. He passed away in 2010.



Enjoying free time together



Relaxed flight back

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