

Remembering Steven M. Podos, MD, 1937–2009

During an ARVO meeting in the late 1960s, I attended a party in David Maurice's room at the Sheraton Sandcastle. Other than David talking with his characteristic dry humor, I don't remember who else was in the room, except this young-looking, smiling fellow dressed in a completely white suit and bow tie; even his shoes were white. Being invited to David's private party was a big deal at that time, especially for eye physiologists, but I did not know who this guy was.

Fast forward to 1975. We were getting a new Chairman of Ophthalmology at Mt. Sinai. It was Steven M. Podos, the fellow I had met in David Maurice's room, and he was still wearing his characteristic bow tie. From day one, I realized Steve was there to move research in the department to a higher level. He himself was funded by the National Eye Institute from 1975 to 1991, and in 1976 he became a member of the VIS-A study section. Research in the department flourished. He got involved with many projects and, with Steve, things had to be completed on schedule. He imposed the same high standards on himself that he imposed on us. We shared many projects. We worked together on large renovations for research space and in running *Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science* from our offices in Mt. Sinai from 1983 to 1988, while he was Editor-in-Chief of the Journal.

Steve was a fast reader. Once, when we were both reading the same reviews to make a decision on a manuscript, he finished when I still had a page to go. He came to the same conclusion as I did. With Steve's abilities, reading faster didn't mean sacrificing comprehension or reducing the ability to absorb knowledge. Steve also had an ability to decide at the beginning of a conversation if the subject was important. If not, you could see him not responding; it was a signal that the conversation was over. Being involved in so many different activities, he had to be very good at filtering, and he was. To avoid waiting and wasting time, Steve would beat the rush hour and be in his office at 6:30 AM, reading all the journals he could find. He had an encyclopedic knowledge and 600 terabytes of memory. If you went to him with what you thought was a new idea or finding, he would tell you who had already done it.

Steve and I also shared some disappointments. A project to merge the Mt. Sinai and New York University schools of medicine and to create a single department of ophthalmology did not materialize after significant effort. Over time, and having shared both positive and negative experiences, we became closer. We often consulted on research issues, and he left me in charge of the department when he took a short sabbatical.

Steve was a wine connoisseur and a gourmet. He told me that he had had a restaurant during his time in St. Louis. I have great memories of the Mt. Sinai ARVO parties at the Hyatt in Sarasota and the departmental Christmas parties in New York, but especially the summer party in the backyard of Steve's house in New Jersey. He knew I liked wines but that I did not buy expensive ones, so at the end of the summer party he would give me a great Chardonnay from his cellar.

In the late 1990s, I started to tell Steve that the rabbit was not a good model for basic transport mechanisms of the anterior segment. I suggested that cows and sheep might be better models. He challenged me with the following idea: "If they are better models, try checking the effect of cortico-steroids on IOP." I had no choice but go to a country where cows and sheep were easy to obtain. Then, when I told him about the



initial positive results, he got extremely excited and started to make plans for all the things we needed to do. I thought the plans were an exaggeration, but he was right. Seven years later, what Steve envisioned became a reality. His intuition gave my research new life and involved my hometown of Corrientes, Argentina, and a local ophthalmologist, Dr. Rosana Gerometta, in significant ophthalmology research.

Steve made plans to visit the "ranch" in Corrientes where we have our animals. Unfortunately, his health started to deteriorate and would not have withstood the 13+-hour trip. The last trip we took together was to the 2007 annual meeting of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) in California, and I remember it fondly. During the last few years of his life, we became very close, having long conversations about our families and our lives.

I am proud that Steve's last two publications are on our work with the sheep model, in *IOVS* and in *Archives of Ophthalmology*. Even when he could no longer come to the office, he remained active and would answer e-mails immediately. As I write these lines at the end of the year, I remember how much he liked the cookies my wife makes. I realize how fortunate I was in sharing 34 years of my life with this strange fellow in the white suit.

Oscar A. Candia

Steve was a mentor and close friend throughout my entire career in ophthalmology, and his talented and vivacious wife Wendy for even longer. He was the ultimate academic ophthalmologist—a highly skilled clinician and surgeon, a superlative hands-on teacher, a dynamic and gifted lecturer and orator, an outstanding clinical and basic scientist with encyclopedic knowledge, and an astonishingly clear original thinker, synthesizer, and crystallizer. He coauthored numerous important textbooks and clinical, translational, and basic research papers that influenced both clinical practice and drug development for glaucoma; trained numerous residents and fellows who have become leaders of academic ophthalmology; and

chaired a superb department of ophthalmology for 30 years—all while maintaining a strong, NIH-funded basic and translational research laboratory. He was an extraordinarily gifted speaker, which well served his every endeavor and our entire field.

Most important, Steve promoted the advancement of academic ophthalmology in innumerable “out front” and behind-the-scenes ways and was passionately devoted to fostering young physician-scientists and basic scientists to populate and lead it. He himself led many major organizations in our field—President and Secretary-Treasurer (later Executive Vice-President) of ARVO, Editor-in-Chief of *Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science*, President and long-standing Executive Vice-President of the Association of University Professors of Oph-

thalmology, and the Alcon Research Institute (which he helped to birth)—to name but a few. He had a unique gift for mentoring people throughout their entire career as medical students, residents, fellows, faculty members, department chairs, and leaders of national organizations. He never forgot you, and you never “graduated” from his friendship and concern. He was authoritative, yet astonishingly approachable. He facilitated more organizations, programs, and advances than one could keep track of and more than most people ever knew. In many ways the entire field depended on him.

Steven Podos was truly a giant in our field. We mourn his loss—our loss—professionally and personally. He was a gift to us and was like no one else.

Paul L. Kaufman