

Professor Emeritus **Tito P. Torralba**: “Man for all seasons”
“*Salin Yaman*” Department of Medicine, University of Santo Tomas, 24 October 2019

by Sandra V. Navarra

To realize that a man of such stature and influence has walked the halls of this prestigious institution, we can't help but feel immensely grateful that most of us here, in one way or another have been witness to his journey. As a Thomasian physician and educator, Dr. Torralba has been at the forefront, spearheading the fast growing field of Rheumatology and medical education. His vast knowledge and expertise is legendary and internationally recognized.

As dean of the UST Faculty of Medicine and Surgery for 7 glorious years, and the only Rheumatologist at UST then - he was clinician, teacher, and administrator rolled in one. I'd like to think that he may have made the most positive impact in changing the course of UST Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. I take this opportunity to share a more intimate glimpse of the person by sharing 3 priceless treasures I received from him.

In my younger years as a faculty during his deanship (with Dr. Sol Alvarez as Department of Medicine chair), Dr. TPT handed me this pointer which looks like a radio antenna doubling as a pen. What is now considered obsolete was one of the most useful necessities of a teacher at that time. It symbolized the fulfillment and pleasures one derives from being a dedicated teacher. He was a TEACHER to no end. Knowledge for him is infinite and every answer to a question never fails to generate more questions.

“The test of a good teacher is not how many questions he can ask his pupils that they will readily answer, but how many questions he inspires them to ask him which he finds it hard to answer (Alice Wellington Rollins)”. “A professor is someone who talks in someone else’s sleep (WH Auden)”. You bet, there were many times Prof TPT would talk in my sleep!

As the only Rheumatology fellow then, I experienced first hand what **self-directed learning** was all about, pouring into the many books and journals in his clinic as I made management decisions – sometimes crucial – on each of his patients. He was a true MENTOR, in the words of Steven Spielberg *“The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves”*. His life is a continuous search for excellence, and it was this drive to excel which dragged us sluggards by our bootstraps that led to higher standards - attested to by the accomplishments of his students now spread all over the country.

He is a man known to mince his every word, it takes a special ability and art to read between the lines to fully grasp the depth and sincerity of his person. Thus, when he says “thank you”, you know it truly comes from the heart. After a successful ASEAN/ Asia Pacific rheumatology meeting where he was overall organizing chair and I was secretary, he gave me an original sculpture – a collector’s item by Italian master Barbella – as his manner of expressing his appreciation. This original work symbolized Dr. Torralba’s own personality signature as he

paved, sculpted his way through the past 50++ years in a continuous **search for excellence**, for himself, for Philippine rheumatology, and for us his students.

Returning from one of his many travels abroad, he gave me this book entitled “Leadership secrets of Attila the Hun”. [For those not so versed in history, Attila was a colorful leader in the 1st century who led the nomadic warrior Huns through one victorious conquest after another]. Although Attila is historically considered to be a savage conqueror, book author Wes Roberts posits that this was mostly a marketing spin designed to strike fear in the hearts of his enemies and respect in his followers. His true success lay in inspiring the Huns and focusing them on a common quest. Was Attila a fierce warrior or master marketer? Either way, he knew how to lead the Huns. The book extolled a list of “Attilaisms”:

- *Great chieftains never take themselves too seriously.*
- *Weak chieftains surround themselves with weak Huns.*
- *A wise chieftain never expects his Huns to act beyond their wisdom and understanding.*
- *Huns learn less from success than they do from failure.*

Indeed, Dr. Torralba with his own style of LEADERSHIP, created organizations and foundations for others to build and grow on. As one of the pillars, he was largely instrumental in placing Philippine rheumatology on the international map. He could be blunt with an unmatched wit sometimes “tagos hanggang buto”, but he has this genuineness of character and fatherly affection, and his heart is always in the right place. The present generation of leaders owe their mentoring and inspiration to him.

A personal tribute by another international icon in Rheumatology, the late Prof. Feng Pao Hsui (a great person who shares similar outstanding attributes of Prof TPT), aptly refers to Prof TPT as a “Man for all seasons” and “The true gentleman” (excerpted from an essay by John Walter Wayland, 1899):

“The true gentleman is the man whose conduct proceeds from goodwill and an acute sense of propriety.

Who does not make the poor man conscious of his poverty, the obscure man of his obscurity.

Who is himself humble if necessity compels him to humble another.

Who does not flatter wealth or boasts of his possessions or achievements.

Who speaks with frankness but always with sincerity and sympathy.

Whose deed follows his word.

Who thinks of the rights and feelings of others rather than his own and who appears well in any company.

A man with whom honour is sacred and virtue safe”

Sir, thank you for setting the stage and blazing the trail for all of us. We will forever remain your students...