

## CENTENARY EDITORIAL

# “Amarcord.” Memories and Anecdotes From my Presidency of the AEDV (1977-1982) from the 50th Anniversary of Our Academy (1959-2009)

When the Director of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* asked me to reflect on my times in charge of the journal as part of the centenary of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV), I was pleased to accept, but remained unconvinced that my reminiscences would be of interest to most AEDV members and readers. However, he insisted, and here I am, seated in front of my computer keyboard, attempting to draw out my memories. That is why I have chosen the title “*Amarcord*” (from “*m'arcord*” or “I remember it”), taken from the splendid Federico Fellini film where memories come and go, just like the large specks of pollen that dance across the screen in the opening sequence of the film: “*le manine scoincidono nel nostro paese con la primavera; sono delle manine di chi che girano, vagano qua e vagano*”, which a loose translation from that background voice would render as: “flakes of flying pollen show that spring has come to our town; they spiral and spin hither and thither”.

## My time as President of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology

Firstly, of more anecdotal than historic interest, I would like to make it clear that when I stood for election as President of the AEDV in 1977, there were 3 candidates: Antonio García Pérez, Miguel Armijo, and myself. At that time the president was elected by vote and in later years the president proposed a board of directors to be approved by the academics. I was honored with the most votes and, as Miguel Armijo came second, I asked him to be my vice president, and he agreed. This was to mark the beginning of a relationship that was not always comfortable as our opinions often differed in the early days. However, we experienced a convergence of opinions on events and ideas over the years and cemented a close friendship based on profound mutual affection.

This is a point to bear in mind, for in all spheres of life, we are currently accustomed to those who stand against each other in elections becoming further separated after the event than before it. But those of us who had ridden out the upheavals and conflicts that were almost a way of life to many of our elders did not want more disagreement, desiring harmony and cooperation instead. And the situation led to a generation of dermatologists amongst

whom, little by little, the desire for joint advancement and companionship always took precedent over the rivalry between schools and individuals. And many of the veteran AEDV members who have lived through this period can bear witness to what I have written.

The post-election board of directors was made up of: Miguel Armijo, Luis Iglesias, Evaristo Sánchez Yus, José Marrón, and later Juan Ocaña as vice presidents; and Agustín Martín Pascual as secretary general (I remember with great esteem his unceasing role as moderator in all circumstances); the editor in chief of *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* was initially Carlos Gay and later Luis Olmos; editorial secretary Francisco Carapeto; treasurer Francisco Corripio; accountant Juan Uruñuela; administrator Antonio Castro; librarian Jaime Toribio; and secretaries Mario Lecha, José Luis Díaz Pérez, Valentín Santidrian, Julio A. González, Enrique Marqués, and Arístides Fonseca. The team thus embraced representatives of various groups, it knew how to work, and was partly responsible for engendering the spirit of harmony that later prevailed.

When we began our mandate *Actas Dermo-Sifiliográficas* was going through a tough time: There was an 8-month backlog in printing issues due to the suffocating 750 000 peseta deficit in funds. The problem was not a shortage of original articles submitted for publication but rather no money to carry on. And that was when we met with the owners of Garsi (García Sicilia, father and son), editors of the journal, in order to seek a solution to our problem. I accepted personal liability for covering the costs whenever funding could not be found, on the basis that they would work to reduce the backlog despite the extended lack of payment. We canvassed advertisers and potential client companies seeking support and requesting more advertising. Everyone was as good as their word, and a year and a half later the journal was back on schedule. When I left the presidency and the board was renewed 4½ years later (in 1982), (Figure 1), we had the satisfaction of seeing that—under the able leadership of Luis Olmos—*Actas* was up to date, distributed on time, and had assets of 3.5 million pesetas (a lot of money in those days). The funds were left to be administered by the incoming board of directors enabling them to operate free of the penury we had initially experienced.

As an aside, I would just like to mention that during those years all changes of roles and terms in Madrid,



**Figure 1.** Photograph of a meeting chaired by myself in my second term as Director, from left to right: Juan Ocaña, Luis Iglesias, José María Mascaró, José Marrón, and Agustín Martín Pascual.

both mine and those of other board members, were voted on individually as was customary at the time. When we medics make a presentation at a far flung congress or write a laborious article, our nonmedic friends (in industry, trade, or other professions) will ask us wisely: "and just what do you get out of it?" And the same question posited after my 4 years as vice president and 4½ as president of the AEDV, elicited the response that my passage through the board of directors has cost me the equivalent of a new car, but has given me far greater satisfaction than I would ever have gained from driving the vehicle.

Even though these years were truly gratifying—not so much for the goals achieved as for the feeling of effort well spent walking this path together—my only frustration, 5 years on, came when we were forced to withdraw Spain's application to host the 1982 World Dermatology Congress in Madrid. There was a lack of support, few funds available, and a shortfall in enthusiasm from those of us who could have made this reality (it takes far more people than just a president—which would have been Professor Gomez Orbaneja—and a general secretary—which would have been me—to make a world meeting happen, and these must be firmly committed to the idea). Was this the last vestiges of the discrepancies of former years? Or perhaps I was simply unable to spread my enthusiasm and find the financial support others encountered more recently when the idea was raised again, 20 years on. I don't know the answer. But this is the only gap, the sole disappointment in a period where I felt honored to play a leading role. Although I am sure my contribution was only small, this grain of sand provided financial balance, continuity of the journal, and contributions to a new era of harmony, in all probability forming a sound basis for the work of our successors.

I am a member of many national and international scientific societies and I have played leading roles in several of them. But the role I feel most proud of, that I will always consider "mine," is within the Spanish Academy of Dermatology where I have been a member for 53 years.

## My Memories of the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology

It was 1959. I was in Barcelona for a brief break from my 10-year period at the Hospital Saint Louis in Paris, organizing the grant that would allow me to survive another year in the French capital and working mornings for Professor Vilanova. That was when I became aware that the AEDV was about to celebrate its 50th anniversary. One morning, our boss, Professor Xavier Vilanova, called me into his office and told me about it. He said he was unable to travel to Madrid on the scheduled date (May 18 and 19) and that I would be designated to represent him (this is actually a simplified version: he initially said I would simply be going and, later, that I would be representing our department). He added that he would pay all the expenses ("I will pay your train ticket—I would prefer you didn't fly because I would worry about you—lodgings and some meals so that you can decently get around the city and invite some colleagues to drinks or dinner" he said. "You will present your own contribution and will also read those of other members of the department who have already submitted names and titles." Then he added, with an ironic smile: "and on your return I will invite you to dinner so you can tell me all about it, including the drinks and nights out.") I was perplexed, but naturally accepted what seemed a totally surprising proposal to me. For I was one of the youngest members of the team, I was also planning to spend a year or 2 in France, away from the service, and now I was going to represent us at the AEDV 50th Anniversary celebrations.

I have no idea exactly why Vilanova and the others decided not to go. What I am certain of is that it was entirely his decision to send me, as his authority was neither open to discussion nor discussed. Had he been overlooked in the planning of the event? Was there some form of friction, personal, institutional, or something of that nature that prompted him to make the decision? This would not be unlikely, given the more uptight interpersonal and interschool relationships of the time referred to above. But why choose me to represent the department for such an event? Probably because I was young, neutral, and was theoretically in a period of postspecialization training far away from Spain. Obviously I did not ask these questions, not that any response would have been given (or perhaps

it would?). So today, I can only speculate. I am not aware of all the facts, and so what I say is anecdotal not historic.

Long days were spent writing my contribution: "Gray-blue cutaneomucous pigmentations in patients treated with synthetic antimalarial drugs" and reading (where provided) the other 5 texts I was to present at the meeting.

But there is little to say about the 50th Anniversary celebrations themselves in this short narrative. A solemn and formal session chaired by Enrique Alvarez Sainz de Aja. A great deal of unexpected deference to myself. I knew few people but knew of many more. Meals with other congress members (Figure 2), where I met Pepe Terencio de las Aguas and began a friendship that was to last for ever.

And, irrespective of the tensions between our elders, dinner and drinks with youngsters like myself who saw life, our training, and work with a mind open to everything and without suspicion.

A slow railway journey back on the trains of the time. Late-night conversations with unknown travel companions outside the profession, some of whom I saw again before I returned to France.

And then, the invitation to dinner with Vilanova. Formal, frank, and authoritative within the department, outside the hospital boundaries he became like an older friend over a beer or a meal.

I described the 50th Anniversary sessions in detail. He was pleased that they had showed me deference ("You were our representative"). And when I finished, he said: "Now tell me about your nights out and the good times you had with the youngsters there." "Boss," I said, "when you suggested I go to this session you asked me to tell you



**Figure 2.** Meal during the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology 50th Anniversary Celebrations. From left to right: José Terencio de las Aguas, José María Mascaró, Manuel Bassas and spouse. On the far left, Jose Mercadal Peyri.

everything later. But I really think what I did or didn't do in my free time should not really be the basis of stories or shaggy dog tales. Don't you think this goes beyond my contractual obligations?" He smiled broadly, much more openly than when he smiled in the hospital. "Insolent boy! Your refusal tells me more than your stories would have!" And he called the waiter to refill our glasses.

**J.M. Mascaró**

*President (1977-1982) and current Honorary President of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*