



## *Graduation Perspective* Graduation and Family

by José Franco, MD – Hepatologist and Associate Dean for Educational Improvement, Medical College of Wisconsin

My daughter graduated from law school last weekend. Listening to her mom talk about mucus and her dad about poop at dinner had long soured her on a medical career. The ceremony was virtual and, I am sure, disappointing to many, but necessary during these challenging times. As the

Dean delivered his opening comments, I found myself becoming both proud and teary-eyed.

Graduations celebrate graduates, their numerous accomplishments, and the excitement of the next phase of a life-long journey. Graduations to me have always been about family, their sacrifices, and the support they provide when things are going well but also when times are tough. As I watched my daughter receive her degree (we were not physically with her), my tears were replaced by a smile as memories of my own graduation surfaced.

My graduation from MCW occurred in May 1990. My parents were coming to Milwaukee for the first time. I remember reassuring them about the excellent May weather and that light jackets would suffice. Of course, meteorology not being my forte (nor the weatherman's), it snowed eight inches two weeks prior.

Details of the graduation ceremony are sketchy after thirty years. The event was held on a weekend at the Milwaukee Exposition Convention Center and Arena (MECCA). This was the home of the Bucks, pre-Bradley Center and Fiserv Forum. Today it is known as the UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena. I do not remember marching in nor marching out of the arena. I recall Leslie Mack, Registrar and Director of Admissions, reading my name as I was instructed to walk across the stage. I do not recall putting on my regalia, who the commencement speaker was (ironic as I am now on the commencement

committee and help select the annual speaker) nor, at the time, remembering the words of the Hippocratic Oath – words that would guide me through the years to cultivate caring and respect for my patients as I trained and practiced.

What I do remember as if it was yesterday was how proud my parents were. As the immigrant son of a carpenter and seamstress, I was the first in the family to graduate college, and now I was a doctor. Throughout the ceremony, I focused on my parents in the audience. They had smiles throughout the duration. I almost wished they could have walked across the stage with me as I realized how much they had given up to make this day possible. I remember the embrace from my father and the hug from my mother once outside of the building. After the ceremony, we joked about how off-base the nuns and my elementary school teacher had been while I was growing up in Spain. The nuns had chased me off the convent grounds. In defense of both, I would occasionally forego school and trespass on the convent grounds to scavenge giant bamboo because it made an excellent fishing pole.

I recall my parents reminding me to send them the formal graduation picture that was taken at the event (I only bought one and proudly sent it to them). My father passed away in 1997 and my mother in 2015. I think about them both every day. When I went through my mom's photo album after her death, my First Communion picture was on page one and my MCW graduation picture on page two. This fall I will gather with my classmates as we celebrate our 30-year reunion, whether in-person or virtually. My parents will be there with me, with the same smiles they had in May of 1990.

Over the next week our soon-to-be graduates will be taking pictures on our three campuses. Many will have their parents and families with them. Graduating in this time of great uncertainty, they will not have the formal ceremony they so richly deserve. Nonetheless, our students will be smiling as will their parents and families. Congratulate them both!



Dr. Franco poses with bamboo growing on the convent grounds in Spain where he grew up, 50 years later.

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