

# Eulogy to Dr. Gisela Del Pino. “I swear ... to hold my teacher in this art equal to my own parents ...”

*Homenagem à Dra. Gisela Del Pino. “I swear ... o hold my teacher in this art equal to my own parents ...”*

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The passing of Dr. Gisela Del Pino brought me profound sadness. I feel obliged to recognize her importance in my development as a Dermatologist and as a human being.

Dr. Gisela graduated from the first medical class at the Federal University of Santa Maria in 1959. As a woman, she must have faced severe prejudice. This did not prevent her from becoming a reference in Dermatology, particularly in Dermatopathology.

Her dedication was remarkable. Besides providing anatomopathological diagnoses, she frequently provided clinical dermatologic advice, when requested by fellow physicians.

She had a special interest in mycobacterial diseases. It was so good to admire her as she studied a slide suggestive of leprosy. She analyzed dozens of microscopy fields in search of the, often very rare, microorganisms. When many would have given up, she mentioned in a joking tone: “to find the bacillus, you have to love the bacillus.”

In her practice, she never obstructed advances in laboratory diagnostics, but she always reinforced the need to explore the potential of the most used dye in Dermatopathology: the hematoxylin-eosin. She was also extremely demanding as regards the history and clinical descriptions and the same requirement was made regarding the care with biopsy fragments. It was imperative to avoid artifacts such as the crushing of samples by forceps. She also insisted that the skin fragments measured no more than 3–4 mm in diameter and do not represent the totality of an organ whose surface is approximately two square meters. With her, I learned that performing biopsies in more than one anatomical site or in lesions at different stages of evolution can bring significant gains. The dynamic behavior of lesions forces the physician to choose, in addition to the most representative location, the evolutionary moment of lesions.

Like other colleagues, I had the opportunity to do a voluntary internship in her laboratory: “Be here on Mondays with a lined notebook.” We examined slides, noted the anatomopathological features, and made the most detailed description possible. Anxiety always accompanied this process. Reviewing the notes, Dr. Gisela described in detail and demonstrated in the microscope the findings with constructive criticism.

Nonetheless, the most lasting learning experience occurred in the early 1980s. Rio Grande do Sul was recording the first cases of AIDS and described what was, perhaps, one of the first local cases of a patient with disseminated Kaposi’s sarcoma. In collaboration with

other colleagues, I presented the case at the Uruguayan Congress on Sexually Transmitted Diseases. The anatomopathological diagnosis and microphotographs were provided by Dr. Gisela and, to recognize her collaboration, we included her as an author. When I returned, I gladly took her a copy of the certificate, as a token of respect and appreciation. In a calm and firm tone of voice, she said: “My son, who authorized the inclusion of my name in this work?” Seeing my obvious embarrassment, she added: “Signing a scientific work is not an honor, it is a responsibility.” I could have felt hurt by her frankness; however, her transparency and the content of her attitude made me admire her even more. From that day on, I considered issues of authorship of scientific papers much more carefully. It is important to remember that this fact occurred long before the current and growing concern with the bio-ethical aspects of research and amid an almost non-existent discussion about authorship criteria. Those who still consider it honorable to obtain “authorship,” without having effectively participated in the work, certainly did not have the opportunity that I had.

Several years later, I expressed my recognition to her in my doctoral thesis. A few days after I sent her a copy of the work, I received a card that I framed and cherish until this day. In her impeccable handwriting, she expressed her satisfaction for “seeing the growth of the children of Sanitary Dermatology.”

Dr. Gisela retired when she still had a lot to offer to patients and colleagues. Probably noticing my surprise, she explained: “My son, we must stop before starting to do silly things.” It was with great pleasure that I visited her after retirement, although much less often than I would have liked. We still had beautiful conversations about the practice of medicine. During her voluntary retreat, she still had so much to offer.

Professionals that know that much, practice, and teach so impeccably should not die. It is certainly her case. Reality, however, is harsh and indifferent. The only thing we can do is to honor their memory and to keep them alive in our hearts.

My acknowledgment and thanks to this very special Doctor that I indeed value as I value my own parents.

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