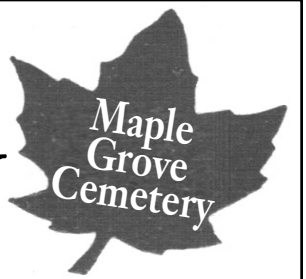


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## Teaching Students Passion For Life

By Christa Weber

**I**t was partly an adventurous spirit and partly the desire to get away from home for a while that brought Eduardo Marti, president of Queensborough Community College, to the United States in 1960. He was 19 years old and while he didn't particularly like what was going on in the Cuban government, it was still a mix of altruism and adventurism that set him on the path toward his future.

"In 1961, my younger sister who was then 12 was going to be sent to the interior of the island as part of the educational reform of Castro's," said Marti.

It was a program wherein students who were able to read were placed in state schools in other areas of the island so they could teach others. Marti's parents felt that their only daughter was being taken away from them and the only solution they could envision was sending her to the United States to live with her brother. Unfortunately, Marti's parents were both in ill health and neither had the stamina to begin a new life. In 1964, both of them passed away, leaving the two siblings to fend for themselves in a foreign country.

"The fact is that we were basically two orphans living in New York City with no support," Marti said. "My sister became my daughter and I never let her forget it. We had some money in the States because my mother would travel there when her conditions required medical treatment and we used that money to go to school."

When the money ran out, Marti was attending New York University (NYU) and his sister was in a boarding school, so the two got an apartment in Staten Island. Marti continued going to school and earned a Bachelor's Degree by taking on a job as a research assistant at the university to earn tuition remission. As his sister went on to earn a degree in sociology, he pursued a Master's Degree in biology, again earning tuition remission by taking on a job as a research assistant in the dental school.

Dedicated by then to a path of working and learning, Marti finished his doctoral thesis and earned a PhD in 1971 while teaching biology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). He remained in his teaching position at BMCC after completing post-doctorate studies at NYU, but still maintained a research position at the school.

"I wanted to be a researcher," he said. "I never intended to teach, but NYU eventually said that I needed to give up my lab or become an assistant professor. It was the difference between a \$21,000 associate professorship at BMCC and a \$13,000 assistant professorship at NYU. You can guess which I chose. That's how I got my start in community colleges."

It wasn't that Marti didn't like teaching, but he had the mind of a researcher and saw himself as such, so teaching without being able to research prompted him to



Photo courtesy of Queens Borough Community College

**It was the search for adventure that brought Cuban immigrant Eduardo Marti, president of Queensborough Community College, to the United States in 1960.**

begin looking elsewhere. After serving on many different committees, he became interested in administration and, in 1975, the president of BMCC appointed Marti as the acting association dean for general studies. He "took to the job like a duck to water."

"I enjoyed it and was a natural," he said. "I was able to use the same research methodology I loved so much."

According to Marti, he had a long-term goal but in order to get there, he had to answer many short term questions. To this day, he uses the same strategies in both his own life and his career.

In 1978, he became the Dean of Faculty at Middlesex Community

College, a small school in Connecticut. In 1982, the president, Robert Chapman, was called on to act as the Interim President at another college in the same state and Marti became acting President at Middlesex. Chapman told Marti that once he sat in the president's chair, he wouldn't ever want to leave it. At the time, Marti answered that he was perfectly happy being a Dean, but Chapman's prediction turned out to be correct.

"I applied for the position of President of the college Chapman was acting as Interim President at, and I became the Executive Dean at Tunxis Community College in 1983," he said. "A pattern emerged. I was very happy there for

three years, but they were trying to create a district to bring three local colleges, including Tunxis, together."

He had been happy as a dean, but it was becoming increasingly clear that he and that new president weren't able to work together. In 1986, he sought out a new post and became president of Tompkins Cortland College in Ithaca. He was there for "eight happy years," and met his wife Patricia. The old pattern rang true, though, and after those eight years, he accepted the position of president at Corning Community College.

"I thought that that was going to be my last post, but in 2000, when I was 58 years old and ready to coast into the sunset, I get a call on a Sunday night from a headhunter saying there is a place in Queens that wants you," he said.

The recruiter started talking and said that 46% of the students at Queensborough Community College (QCC) are immigrants. That really hit Marti, as an immigrant who was enjoying a successful career. He said to himself, "what a wonderful way to finish my career where I could give to others what was given to me."

According to Marti, whether you are a person who is born in the United States or an immigrant, people who come to a community college are generally under-prepared to meet the rigors of the society.

"We have many students who come to us from local high schools who maybe didn't take the schooling seriously, but in both cases I believe that community colleges have the responsibility to provide an effective pathway to gather the tools that are necessary to survive in this society," he said.

Marti believes that those tools are rooted in the principles of general education. The ability to think critically, to have a historical context and to have aesthetic appreciation. He maintains that all of the other skills can be acquired easily, but those principles of general education are what makes a productive citizen. He feels that QCC, which has 12,000 students from 135 different countries, is doing just that.

He said that he takes very seriously the mission of training people for entry level jobs and the responsibility of educating people for a better life.

"My goal is to create an environment where our students are getting the skills they need for a job and the students are also imbued with the passion that is necessary for a productive life," he said.