

# Neurologist, Cognitive Neuroscientist, Inspirer of Psychologists, and Humanist: An Appreciation of Oscar Marin

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In the course of completing a joint PhD in biology and psychology at Harvard University, I decided to take the first and second years of neurology at Harvard Medical School. My first lecturer in first-year neuroanatomy was Jay Angevine. His first words were: “Some people say neuroanatomy is like naming the raisins in a fruitcake.” (Pause.) “Some raisins.” (Pause.) “Some fruitcake.” (This magnificent beginning had even more meaning at the time, 1959, because some of us were aware of its “source.” At the onset of the Battle of Britain in World War II, Adolph Hitler had announced that he would wring the British chicken’s neck. Churchill’s response was, “Some chicken. Some neck.”)

Oscar Marin made that fruitcake sing for me.

Earlier this year, in looking at Oscar’s curriculum vitae, I discovered that a few years after I had heard this lecture, he published three papers with Jay Angevine.

The clinical (second) year of neurology training included instruction and case presentations by Harvard luminaries Raymond Adams and Derek Denny-Brown. These experiences fascinated and excited me as windows into the human mind. The same Oscar *vita* shows that he later published with Denny-Brown. So I had indirect contact with Oscar through both Angevine and Denny-Brown about a decade before I met him.

More than anyone in my life, Oscar showed me how great the fruitcake was, and that damage to it was a window on the mind. He made the brain sing.

After my postdoctoral training, I joined the faculty of the Psychology Department at the University of

Pennsylvania. I don’t remember how I discovered Oscar when he was on the staff at Philadelphia General Hospital, but I do know that, prepared by my Harvard education, I was immediately attracted to him. We discovered many areas of common interest, including classical music as well as studies of the mind and brain, and Oscar and his wife, Clara, became good friends of myself and my wife, Elisabeth Rozin.

My name does not appear on Oscar’s *vita*, nor does his appear on mine. But the seminars that we did together, primarily in the living room of my home in a suburb of Philadelphia, were exciting to me and others, and were reinforced by case presentations that he made to us, primarily at the Wilmington Medical Center. Seminar attendees included Burton Rosner and Philip Teitelbaum.

These seminars had three very special participants: Eleanor Saffran, a postdoctoral fellow; Myrna Schwartz, a graduate student of Philip Teitelbaum [see Dr Schwartz’s article in this issue]; and my own graduate student Morris Moscovitch. Morris had already been working on behavioral measures of hemispheric specialization. Oscar reinforced this interest and introduced Morris to clinical neurology, which became a major component in Morris’ distinguished career. Eleanor and Myrna were not working on the brain and the mind when they first came to these seminars. The readings, discussions, and clinical case presentations converted each of them to working on the brain and mind. As all who know the field realize, the rest is history, and a very distinguished history, for both of them.

From the beginning, I realized that Oscar was a very special neurologist. His ability to diagnose the site of a brain lesion after just minutes with a patient fascinated and amazed me. From him I learned a little about how to look. And, more than any other medical colleague I have had, Oscar appreciated the whole person—not only the compromise in function of many unfortunate brain-damaged humans, but the glorious accomplishments of *Homo sapiens* at its best, the Mozarts and the Shakespeares. Oscar was a humanist, who belonged in many ways to the arts and sciences as opposed to medicine. We were fortunate that he taught neurology to our psychology graduate students for a few years, bringing both excitement and culture to this enterprise.

I was crushed when Oscar left for Johns Hopkins, although it was an entirely sensible move. Eleanor Saffran and Myrna Schwartz followed him there, and their

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mutual work was impressive. Subsequently, both Eleanor and Myrna developed their own lines of important research in Philadelphia.

I was more tied to Penn. With less access to inspiration from Oscar and much less access to patients, I turned my attention away from what was to become the exciting area of cognitive neuroscience. It might be what I was doing now if the inspiration of Oscar had stayed in Philadelphia. Oscar Marin helped launch the field.

I published only a few papers on the brain and the mind. But I think I have made a significant contribution to the field simply by serving as the vehicle for exposing

Morris Moscovitch, Eleanor Saffran, and Myrna Schwartz to Oscar Marin and the excitement of the dissociations produced by brain damage. Through Oscar, I facilitated the entry of three major contributors into the study of brain and mind. Of course, more importantly, Oscar served to engage these three important scholars in the enterprise of cognitive neuroscience. This engagement is not the kind of thing that appears on a *vita*, though these days a *vita* is taken to be a summary of one's contribution. I count this engagement as one of my major contributions to psychology, although it does not appear on my *vita*.