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## THE MANY NAMES OF ROBERT POZOS

Written by June Grayson

They call him Doctor Icebox. And with good reason. In 1977 he founded the now world-famous hypothermia laboratory at the University of Minnesota Medical School at Duluth. His official title was Robert Steven Pozos, Ph. D., Associate Professor of Physiology, Head of the Department of Physiology, and Director of the Hypothermia Laboratory.

He calls himself a Chicano from California. Both of his parents were Mexican. He grew up in Ventura where his father worked as a welder to support a wife and five children.

Since last December he has had a new title: Vice-President for Minority Affairs and Professor of Physiology and Biophysics, Department of Physiology, School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle.

Add all of the educational and research attainments detailed in his 24 page, single-spaced curriculum vitae. Clearly, Pozos is one busy and accomplished, 46 year old Hispanic.

"To be a university professor with tenure is to have the best of all possible worlds," Dr Pozos says. "I choose the research I want to pursue. I interact with students. I travel. I contribute to the world. This is an exciting and fulfilling life."

Only one thing was missing at Duluth - his own people. Few Hispanics live in Minnesota. "Every time I returned to California, I thought - if I could only do something to get Chicano kids interested in science and higher education."

Last December, the University of Washington made him an offer he couldn't refuse. "As a professor in its Department of Physiology, I can still do my research. In addition, as the Vice-President in charge of Minority Affairs who reports directly to the President of the University, I can make a

difference in the lives of minority students."

Pozos says that 25% of the 35,000 students on the Seattle campus are members of a minority - Hispanics, Native Americans, and Pacific Rim. "We have to make our minority students want to stay in college. I hope to do that by placing students in research laboratories with prestigious faculty members as their mentors. That is where they will catch the excitement of a scientific career."

For the next three years he will continue as a consultant and return periodically to Duluth to supervise his hypothermia research. "We study anything you do in the cold," Pozos explains. "Our results can be applied to space research, oceanbed exploration, and cold weather work and travel."

Government grants provide partial funding for the laboratory work. The armed forces need improved survival gear for outside workers in cold climates and for navy and flight personnel who might have to ditch in a frigid ocean.

"Hypothermia experiments are relevant to Hispanics, also," Pozos says. "Many are in the armed forces. Our research may save lives in the mountainous regions of South America where high altitudes and cold cause problems."

More than 500 volunteers - usually young and healthy medical

students - have floated in the laboratory's cold water basement tank or in the icy waters of Lake Superior to provide data for his medical research. Multiple electrodes applied to their body surfaces measure their physiological responses.

The term hypothermia refers to a subnormal body temperature - one that is 95 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Normal body temperature is usually quoted as 98.6 F. Exposure to cold may cause accidental hypothermia. Medically, hypothermia refers to the artificial reduction of body temperature to slow metabolic processes - as in heart surgery, for example.

Already research at the lab has helped emergency room doctors. "We now know that victims of cold exposure can survive much longer than previously thought possible," Pozos says.

A note on the office door of Dr. Lorentz Wittmers, the new director of the laboratory since Pozos left, says - "You aren't dead until you are warm and dead." That means that a hypothermia victim cannot be pronounced dead unless vital signs do not return after complete rewarming. Frozen victims can make miraculous recoveries.

Since shivering and stuttering are some of the body's responses to cold, hypothermia research may also provide medical

applications for people who "shiver" and "shake" with diseases such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, and speech problems.

You might even call Pozos a new media star. Cold research is a trendy topic now. "People ask how kids can survive, about the best rewarming techniques, and about the effect of cold on the homeless," Pozos says.

An Australian television crew came to Duluth last year to film a story on his research. You may already have read about him in newspapers and magazines such as Good Housekeeping, Omni, and Discover. Or you may have seen him on talk shows including one segment of the McNeill-Lehrer Report.

"Glasnost" has even reached his laboratory. Last year Professor U. V. Lupandin of Petrozavodak University, Russia, wrote Dr. Pozos to propose a joint Russian-American research project into further aspects of hypothermia. "This is what is so exciting about science," Pozos exclaims. "You never know where it is going to lead you next or what bridges you may be able to build in the world."

Add still another name for Dr. Pozos to this list: expert witness. Lawyers request his testimony in cold-related court cases - such as the one in which a husband was accused of

drowning his wife in a faked boating accident. Based on his years of research, Pozos proved that the husband's version of the accident could not be true. The husband was found guilty.

An academic career will not protect you from controversy, however. Pozos discovered this last year when he raised the question: is it ethical to use medical data from victims of torture?

In World War II, Germany ordered its scientists to find ways to save its fighter pilots. Too many were dying when their planes went down in the English Channel and North Sea. These researchers performed truly brutal hypothermia experiments on concentration camp inmates and prisoners of war. They placed the victims in salt water and monitored their responses while they literally froze them to death.

The results of these experiments, buried in official government archives throughout the world, have posed a moral dilemma for civilization ever since. Should the data, no matter how morally tainted, be used if it could help save lives?

Pozos discussed this issue with Dr. Arthur Caplan, a Professor at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and Director of its Center for Biomedical Ethics. Dr. Caplan wrote

an editorial for a Minneapolis newspaper discussing the use of the Nazi data.

Jewish spokesmen, whose people were victims of the Nazi Holocaust, generally renounce all such attempts. Jay Katz, M.D., professor of law and psychoanalysis at Yale Law School, wrote, "These data are not objective; they are soaked in blood...When we choose to benefit from evil and make it a part of our history, we perpetuate evil."

Yet even some Holocaust survivors say, "Use this horrible data to help other people so those deaths will not have been in vain."

Spurred by this debate, the University of Minnesota will sponsor "The Meaning of the Holocaust for Bioethics", a three day international seminar in Minneapolis next month. Russia, Germany, Israel, and Denmark will send speakers. Dr. Pozos will speak on the "Legal and Moralistic Perspectives of the Analysis of Accurate Data Gathered by Unethical Means."

"We Hispanics have suffered torture, too, in our quests for freedom," Pozos says. "We hope this seminar will create a truly global climate of opinion in emerging medical ethics so that such barbarous experiments will never be performed again. Wherever you have powerless people who are the downtrodden

members of society, you will have other people who try to take advantage of them. We must sensitize each new generation to human rights and ethical values."

A Catholic, Pozos attends his church regularly. "The older I get, the more philosophical I become," Pozos muses. "We have the chance to choose good or evil. I believe that most people have the potential to demonstrate true nobility in their lives."

Dr. Pozos credits whatever success he has attained to his parents. "Neither of them had a chance to get an education. Yet my father worked as a welder until he was 70 years old so his children could go to college. He taught himself the multiplication tables. My mother taught herself to read in the public library. She always encouraged us. All five of us finished college, we all have good jobs, and most of us have also earned advanced degrees."

Pozos wants to pass on this heritage to other Hispanics. "Education is not just dull textbooks and test tubes. My greatest reward would be if some kid out there would read this story and say - hey, this guy really likes what he is doing. It sounds exciting. Maybe I can do it, too."

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For further information about the seminar, "The Meaning of Holocaust for Bioethics," call the Office of Continuing Medical Education, University of Minnesota, 1-612-626-5525. It will be held May 15, 16, 17, at the University Ratisson Hotel, 1615 Washington Avenue South, Minneapolis, Mn 55414. Anyone interested may attend. Registration deadline is May 1st. Fee is \$150.00. Space is limited.

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