
Letter in Memory of Tirso Ríos (1930-2012)

Nikolaus H. Fisher

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Dear Angela, Luciana and Family, dear Faculty and Students of the Instituto de Química, dear guests:

I acknowledge the invitation to participate in this gathering to honor the life of Dr. Tirso Rios Castillo, and to write this letter.

First let me introduce myself to the younger members of the audience. My name is Nikolaus H. Fischer, but my family and friends call me Klaus. Everybody at UNAM knows me as Klaus. I am Professor Emeritus of the Department of Chemistry, Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. There I served on the Faculty from 1967 to 1999, teaching organic chemistry and doing research in natural products chemistry. After my retirement from LSU, I was Chairman of the Department of Pharmacognosy at The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) in Oxford, MS for about four years. I am now retired since the end of 2003, and my wife Helga and I live in Denton Texas, where we are close to our children and grandchildren.

My acquaintance with the Instituto de Química, UNAM, goes back into the 1970s and I have many good memories spending time with the Faculty and students of the Instituto as well as the Facultad de Química. Very close scientific and personal relationships developed between our group at LSU and the Faculty at the Instituto de Química at UNAM. From these scientific and personal interactions, lifetime friendships developed over the years. These I very much cherish. My past frequent visits to Mexico left me with very fond memories. I have stated frequently, that Mexico is my second home.

I learned early about Tirso Rios and his colleagues at UNAM, when his student, Dr. Leovigildo Quijano, joined my research group at LSU in 1978. Leo was a great mentor for my undergraduate and graduate students at LSU. So Tirso's legacy as a scientist and mentor is not only restricted to UNAM and Mexico, but also across the borders of your country. My former students received the chemical knowledge and laboratory techniques, which were handed down from Tirso to Leo to them. Others carried this knowledge back to their home countries all over world: to North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. This is the beauty of science: it knows no borders! And Tirso strongly believed in it.

During my frequent visits to Mexico, I had the opportunity to learn about Tirso as a person. It was his great desire to bring scientists from all of Latinamerica together, and strengthen and consolidate the field of Natural Products in these countries. I

vividly remember the First and Second Congress of the "Academia Latinoamericana de Fitoquímica" in March of 1986 and 1988, respectively. It gave me the opportunity to meet, besides my colleagues from Mexico, scientists from other countries in Latinamerica. The Third Congress of the Academy was in October 1993 at the Instituto Tecnológico de Celaya, where I not only learned about the active scientific life, but also the beautiful cultural traditions of the different regions of Mexico.

Tirso was a man of broad interests. Besides science, in general, and natural products chemistry, in particular, he appreciated the Arts and enjoyed a close friendship with the painter Vidal, whose Poster for the First Congress of the "Academia Latinoamericana de Fitoquímica" has a dominant place in our house and I look at it every day. Tirso was also a generous friend and host. I remember one visit at UNAM with my wife Helga, being together with Tirso, his daughter Louisiana and Leo Quijano. In spite of the language difficulties (I know I should have learned Spanish!), it was a highly enjoyable and entertaining event with interesting storytelling and many laughs.

As a guest and speaker at the 50° Anniversary of the Instituto de Química in 1991, upon the invitation of the late Dr. Fernando Walls, I learned about the history of the Instituto and the great scientists that worked there, Tirso being one of them. A man of great scientific vision and accomplishment, Dr. Rios had high scientific standards, which he set for himself and his students.

My greatest honor as a scientist is without doubt the introduction as a Corresponding Member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences in May of 1998. I am convinced that Tirso, who was a member of the Academy, supported my nomination, and I am still today very thankful for this great honor.

In conclusion, my wife Helga and I would like to join today's celebration of Tirso's Life and his accomplishments as a scientist, mentor and friend, in making funds available for two hard-working, deserving students in the field of natural products at the Instituto de Química, selected by members of the Faculty of the Instituto de Química.

This is in Honor and the Memory of Dr. Tirso Rios Castillo!

All our best wishes to Tirso's family and all the members of this audience.

Yours, Helga and Klaus Fischer