



Volume 12 • Issue 4 • Fall 2022

# No Bones About it

## Immigrants



**Manuel Molina, MD,  
President**

Welcome fellow members of the West Virginia Orthopaedic Society to the fall issue of our representative newsletter. This is a special time of year, highlighted by a multitude of cultural and religious holidays. Despite the commercialism, we all know the holiday season is meant to be spent with family and friends. Enjoy them to the fullest.

The purpose of our newsletter, "No Bones About It," is to highlight our society and its members by informing our readers about what truly makes us special. When it comes down to it, it really is all about our membership. Whether they be members who have been here actively working for many decades, or resident members

who are still within their educational process of training, so many of our members have stories to tell about how they arrived here.

In the state of West Virginia, they function as orthopaedic surgeons and provide services to our communities. The practice of orthopaedic medicine in this region has a long history, much longer than even our established recognition of statehood in 1863.

Since the westward expansion of the colonies beyond the Alleghenies into what would become the settlement of the Ohio Valley that stretched from the Wheeling area to Kentucky, there have been immigrants. Another route for migration through those mountains was from the southern Greenbrier region (named for its green prickly thorns) using the New River as a transit to the Kanawha River and then to the Ohio River. All of the ancestry of this State came from somewhere. That means all of us who live

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# Dr. Cheung Says He's Boring...NOT

**"As much as I  
tried to  
rebel against  
my dad...  
the apple didn't  
fall far from the  
tree."**

**- Dr. Cheung**

Felix Cheung, when first asked for his story, said, "I'm boring. I was born in Canada, went to Harvard and work at Marshall."

Somehow, that doesn't tell the whole story.

Cheung was born in Canada of Chinese immigrant parents and came to the United States at the age of two.

Father Cheung finished his residency in general surgery at Royal Victoria Hospital in Ontario, Canada, before moving to this country. He started his fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan, where his focus was on surgical oncology.

"As much as I tried to rebel against my dad by going into engineering, the apple did not fall far from the tree," Cheung explained.

"I matched in the West Virginia University Orthopaedic residency, which was a top choice for me," he said when explaining how he got from Manhattan to West Virginia. "When looking for a job, the opportunity to help Dr. Oliashirazi start a residency program was too great to pass up."

Cheung and his wife thought they would be here for five years, but he says they found a great community and it has been 14 years and counting.

Felix and his wife have had their family in West Virginia (and they've had starring roles on several of our Zoom events).



In addition to being one of two orthopaedic oncologists in West Virginia, Cheung has been active in the West Virginia Orthopaedic Society for a number of years.

As the "pandemic president," he was one of the leaders behind our move to monthly Journal Club activities for members, a program which has matured into the OrthoMatters events of broad interest to the Society's members. Currently, he serves at the Society's immediate past president.

In his continuing work with residents from both Marshall and West Virginia University's, he is active in promoting their attendance at the AAOS National Orthopaedic Leadership Conference. This work helps develop and understanding of and passion for advocacy on behalf of the profession at the state and Congressional levels.

Far from boring, this Canadian is having a lasting impact on the WVOS.

# He Worked Locally, Taught Globally

Dr. Jack Koay was born and raised in Malaysia, deciding as a teen to be a doctor and earning his medical degree from the National Taiwan University School of Medicine and passing the ECFMG before coming to the USA for additional training.

He spent seven years training in orthopaedics, with fellowship training in hand surgery. While completing his fellowship at Cook County Hospital, the Chairman of the Department recommended Koay visit hand surgical training centers in Europe, so he went to England's Pulvertaft Hand Centre, Royal Derby Hospital, Scotland's Princess Margaret Rose Orthopedic Hospital in Edinburg and France's American Hospital in Paris.

He chose to start his practice in Fairmont after completing his fellowship in 1971. "I had already completed training in general surgery and orthopaedics at Charleston Memorial Hospital and WVU, and I preferred small fish in the pond rather than in the sea," Koay said.

After nearly 50 years in

practice, Koay said Fairmont was the right choice. "People in Fairmont are friendly and sincere, and I love the community and Fairmont General Hospital (FGH), where I performed 16,000 surgeries," he said. "I have been greatly welcomed by the community."

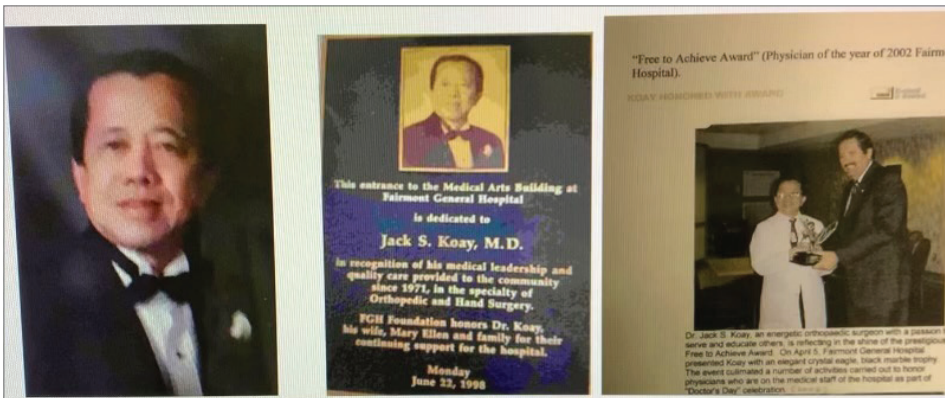
FGH honored Koay over the year by placing his portrait on the ICU waiting room wall, naming a section of FGH in his honor (including a bronze portrait at the entrance) and choosing him as the 2001 best medical achievement physician of the year.

While in a busy private practice, Koay presented on the history of western medicine and scientific hand surgery papers across the US and globally in Australia, Bahamas, Bermuda, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Taiwan and the UK.

His wife, Mary Ellen Koay, PhD, has retired from 45 years as a WVU professor. They have two daughters who are engineers (from WVU and MIT) and one daughter, one son and a daughter-in-law who are physicians trained at WVU.

**"I preferred  
small fish in  
the pond rather  
than in the sea."**

**- Dr. Koay**



# Coal Miner's Son Is WVOS Founder

**"There were  
three of us in  
my 10th grade  
biology class  
who went on to  
become  
physicians."  
- Dr. Majestro**

One of the founders of the West Virginia Orthopaedic Society, Tony Majestro is the child of Italian immigrants.

Due to extreme poverty in their hometown of Sicily, Italy, his father immigrated to the US in 1912. He served in the US Army in World War I until 1917 as an immigrant, before returning to Italy and marrying.

Their first-born daughter arrived 1925. By 1927, conditions in Italy worsened and Mr. Majestro wanted to return to the US. Although his expired visa prohibited him from returning, friends living in the US told him immigrants who were World War I veterans were eligible for US citizenship. He showed his service record and was awarded citizenship.

He stayed with friends in McDowell County, WV and took a job as a coal miner.

In 1929, my father sent for my mother and my then four-year-old sister. My mother was concerned about moving to the US; she could not speak the language and was worried about not having relatives here. However, she wanted to join her husband. As part of the protocol for traveling to the US, mother and daughter needed physical exams. Young Miss Majestro refused to let the doctors examine her on several occasions, kicking and screaming every time. In the end, her maternal grandparents agreed to keep her so Mrs. Majestro could join her husband in the US.



Mr. Majestro returned to Italy in 1939 to bring his 14-year-old daughter back to the US, but she still refused, so she continued to live in Italy.

As the years, the Majestro family was blessed with six more children, three girls, Tony and finally twin girls.

"My 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology teacher gave us a course in human anatomy and physiology, during which I became interested in medicine," Dr. Majestro recalled. "There were three of us in my class that went on to medical school and became physicians."

Born in McDowell County, this WVOS founder earned undergraduate and medical degrees from WVU and completed his orthopaedic residency at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. He served in the Army before coming to Charleston in 1973 and partnering with Dr. Jack Pushkin. His current partner is WVOS President Manny Molina.

He and his wife, Prudence, have been married since 1963 and have three children.



# He Knows Small Things Matter

"I've always wanted to be in medicine, although I decided on orthopedics towards the end of third year in medical school," said Marshall's Chair of Orthopaedics Dr. Ali Oliashirazi.

"My mom and I came to the US from Iran in 1979 when I was 12 years old, and made our home in San Francisco. When I went to university, I was always headed back to Los Angeles or San Francisco, where my family is from," he recalled. "But then I met a girl . . . and ended up in Huntington, where Corinna and I now have four children! And I have loved every moment...."

It was a long journey to Huntington and Marshall.

The 1978 Iranian Revolution led to the ouster of the Shah. Oliashirazi's mother was a longtime principal of a K-12 school for orphans. That school became one of the top schools in the country. She received many awards from the Shah for her accomplishments. "No one could've predicted how significant these awards would be in the future for us," he said.

It was during that year his mother mom decided they needed to leave Iran.

Leaving the country at that time was nearly impossible, he recalled. Two of her past students who had high government jobs heard about his mother wanting to leave the country. They provided passports for Oliashirazi and his parents, three plane tickets and US visas. He recalls, "One of



the most memorable times in my life was hearing them tell my mom that these documents are for 'everything she's done for the orphans of Tehran'."

He remembered, "We sold everything we had, but my dad backed out at the airport. He thought leaving Iran was a terrible idea since we did not speak the language and did not have jobs in the US. On that fateful day, my mom and I were the only two that left Iran."

Mother and son ended up living in a Mosque in San Francisco for about 11 months, where she was allowed to start a Persian language school. The school blossomed and they got back on their feet quickly.

Their visas expired and they were facing deportation during the Iran hostage crisis.

"Thankfully, to make a long story short, my mom's awards from the Shah helped us show that we may be at risk if we were deported," he said. "We were allowed to stay in the US."

And we're all glad they did!

**"No one could  
have predicted  
how significant  
my mother's  
awards would  
be for us in the  
future."**

**- Dr. Oliashirazi**

# MD, MBA, Citizenship...What's Next?

**"We learned  
that life  
manages to  
open a window  
after it closes  
all doors."  
- Dr. Sraj**

Dr. Shafic Sraj and his wife, Mawra, came to the US in 2007 when he was 28, following his education and medical school training at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Their parents still live there.

Family influences and his caring for people led him to pursue medicine, but the eventual path was unexpected.

Married for three years and expecting their first child, the plan was simple: complete two years of orthopaedic fellowship, then return home to an almost guaranteed job. Mawra, college-educated and trilingual, would be a stay-at-home mom to their infant son.

They faced what many immigrants often face. They had an apartment, but no furniture, furnishings or kitchenware. They opened a bank account and applied for utilities, a process new to them. Without a US credit score, and no credit cards, they put down a lot of deposits in cash, spending their savings in just one week. They had no friends, were a bit lonely and, while they could speak English well, they could not 'think' the language.

Shortly after the birth of the first son, Sraj learned the promised job back home was not available anymore, and that he had to pass a licensing exam for international medical graduates (IMGs) to stay in the US. He had only one chance to take the exam, which he passed.



"Shortly before our visas expired in 2008, we learned that life manages to open a window after it closes all doors," Sraj said. His then-director put in a good word for him with another program that had an unexpected opening. One phone interview and a week later, there's a job!

The story ends with a pleasant surprise. The Srajs did not know what a tax return was, but discovered their tax refund check came as a gift that allowed them to visit family in Lebanon and return to the US on day 364 and restart their life in the US.

Sraj and family settled in Weston and he now is on staff at WVU. He is completing his MBA studies and has already served as President of the WV State Medical Association. Our favorite overachiever will lead WVOS in 2023-2024.

The Srajs became proud US citizens in 2020 and have two sons.

# Save the Date for 2023 @ Stonewall



**Save the Date**  
**We're going to Stonewall**  
**Resort on**  
**April 21-22, 2023!**  
**Registration opening**  
**mid-January!**  
**Case studies...golf...more**

Mark your  
calendar for the  
2023 WVOS and  
WVAOE Spring  
Break Meeting!

**"We are very  
fortunate to  
have so many  
physicians who  
have chosen  
to share their  
knowledge and  
experience  
by calling WV  
home."  
- Dr. Molina**

**Immigrants** More from page 1  
in this region have in some  
form or another a history of  
immigration. I don't know who  
the first physician that called  
themselves a specialist in the  
care of musculoskeletal disease  
was, but I'm sure he came from  
somewhere else first.

We chose this issue to  
focus on personalities from our  
Society who have interesting  
stories on how they arrived  
here and began working in  
the State of West Virginia. The  
stories are of active members  
who gladly share the how and  
the why they are here. We  
are very fortunate in this state  
to have many physicians who  
have chosen to share their  
knowledge and experience in  
the care of our communities by  
calling this place home. There  
are way too many examples of  
orthopaedic surgeons who have  
worked in West Virginia to list  
and name them all.

Some who had interesting  
and special stories have left  
us. One was my friend Dr.  
Luis Loimil, who trained at  
West Virginia University in  
orthopaedics and stayed and  
worked his life and career here  
until his passing from cancer.  
The interesting story is that Dr.  
Loimil's father worked for the  
Juan Peron administration in  
Argentina and left when they  
were ousted from power.

Another one of my friends  
in the Charleston area was  
Dr. Joseph Fernandes who  
was born in Mangalore, India,  
graduated from medical school  
at the University of Padua in  
Italy, and did fellowship training  
in Edinburgh, Scotland, before  
moving to the United States  
and, ultimately, West Virginia.

I myself am a first-  
generation American, born  
in Havana, Cuba in 1959, to  
parents who actively protested  
against the Batista regime.  
They celebrated the early  
victory of Fidel Castro until they  
became disillusioned by his  
progression to communism and  
joined in a counterrevolutionary  
movement that would restore  
a national constitution to its  
people. Unfortunately, they  
were imprisoned because of  
their efforts but, ultimately, with  
the assistance of the United  
States, immigrated to Florida.  
My father was required to  
repeat his residency in urology,  
and subsequently moved to  
Huntington, West Virginia.  
There, he continued to work for  
over 40 years until his passing.  
My particular story not quite  
as interesting. I grew up in  
Huntington after leaving Cuba  
as a child, was educated and,  
after my residency, returned to  
the place I call my home.

All of us have a story. How  
we got here is worth telling.  
And as an orthopaedist working  
in the State of West Virginia,  
knowing my background as well  
as many others, I like to think  
of the line from the Hamilton  
Broadway play, "Immigrants ...  
We Get The Job Done."

Hopefully you enjoy reading  
about your colleagues and their  
sometimes humorous stories.  
Mostly we are grateful that  
they are here working with us,  
making the WVOS greater.

### **2023 Spring Break Meeting**

As elected board members.  
we are preparing and working  
on our upcoming meeting  
on April 21 - 22, 2023 at

**Immigrants** More on page 15



**Immigrants** More from page 14  
Stonewall Resort. We hope once again provide an excellent program that will surpass last year's success. As usual, it will feature educational presentations given by experts from within the state as well as a national representative to speak about our problems with prior authorization. Our yearly resident research competition will return with its awards. Although the final agenda has not been set and we are still open to suggestions by our membership, it is getting close.



We are privileged to name Dr. Sanford Emery, MD, MBA as our Distinguished Guest of Honor for the meeting. Dr. Emery, who has served as chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics at West Virginia University since 2003, holds many accolades and honors for a distinguished career in education and spinal surgery. He has ascended to serve as president of such organizations as the American Orthopedic Association, the

American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery, and the Cervical Spine Research Society to name a few. He has been strongly involved in the activities of the West Virginia Orthopaedic Society to the great benefit of all in this membership. He will be introduced by Dr. Joe Prud'homme. With his pending retirement this summer, we want to show our appreciation for his efforts in promoting the advancement of orthopaedic practice and education in our state and elsewhere.

Finally, I wish to remind all of you again about the importance of supporting those advocacy groups that support us in practice. There's still time to donate to OrthoPac and WesPac.

Once again, whether you're celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Boxing Day or any other celebration, we wish you a wonderful holiday season. "Good Times, Good Cheer, and a Happy New Year."



Good times

Good Cheer

Happy New

Year!

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 ever to consider contributing  
 to  
Ortho PAC  
 to help make your voice  
 heard on issues of  
 importance to  
 orthopaedic medicine and  
 your patients!**

**Text 'AAOS' to '41444' or  
 visit the webpage...**

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