

# ALUMNI HALL OF FAME!

## Richard Dolmetsch Cuevas '86



As we mentioned in our last issue, Richard is a PhD. from Stanford University; since he lives in California we emailed a series of questions in order to make our

interview. The result was a combination of memories, history, personal anecdotes, and scientific information, all in a pleasant document which we decided to transcribe. We are sure you'll enjoy reading it.

"Though I graduated almost twenty years ago from the Colegio Bolivar, my time at CB seems to occupy a disproportionate amount of real estate in my brain. In fact, the roster of the Deportivo Cali in 1978 and my time at CB easily occupy half of my cortex. So, while I can't always remember the names of the members of my lab, I can remember with extraordinary clarity all the members of my graduating class... and their siblings, their parents and some of their pets. This is to say I would fight rabid weasels just to see what became of all the people who shared my misspent youth.

My life so far provides evidence that there is no correlation between time spent in detention and future success in academia. I would conservatively estimate that I spent at least one out of my last three years in school, in trouble for something. This included a suspension (along with David Laing) for composing erotic limericks about various faculty members, and various tours of duty in the clean up squad for decorating faculty desks with graffiti and creative papier mache sculptures. So I have many memories of CB...not all of them publishable.

In answer to your questions...I fondly remember long and acrimonious discussions with Alberto Bejarano and Leonel Ordonez (Mr. Ordoñez) about capitalism and communism that did not

resolve anything, but did prevent us from having to listen to Mr. Ordoñez's lecture about proverbs. I also remember a physics project that involved wandering around the countryside, in an old Nissan Jeep, with a two meter square black Styrofoam box, taking pictures of a ping pong ball. This turned out to be the slowest and most inconvenient way of measuring the coefficient of friction of air, specially considering that the box kept falling off the back of the Jeep and breaking into very small fragments of box. It did, however, leave me with an abiding love of physics that somehow morphed into a career. I also have great memories of various disastrously bad school plays. I remember my moment of glory in South Pacific in which I played a sailor that had some sort of movement disorder and one spoken line. I also starred in Pippin where I played a dead Viking and a tree.

**"I did go to the world track and field championships in Athens... I managed to beat almost all the women except the ones from East Germany."**

I would not trade my time at CB for anything. I still have some idiosyncratic gaps in my education, like for instance I know a great deal about precolombian history but essentially no modern Colombian history. On the other hand, at CB I was surrounded by funny, smart, curious teachers and classmates. You can't ask for anything more than that. For instance, Lynn Warner taught me English and more or less instilled in me a life long love of Shakespeare and of English literature. Manuelita taught me chemistry, and I must have learned some of it because I never got a B in chemistry again. Mr. Strom taught me biology, the only course where I did really well, proving that I could be good at something other than cracking jokes. Martin Felton was a friend of my parents and must have looked out for me because despite all my indiscipline I managed to graduate and get into Brown. So overall I am quite certain that what ever I have done I owe largely to

the people who taught, inspired me and tolerated me when I was a teenager in Colombia.

**"I once transported two human brains across the Stanford campus on the back of my bicycle."**

So what have I done since I graduated from CB in 1986? Well, when I graduated from CB I was the national champion in the long jump but I didn't feel I could parlay that particular skill into a job. I did go to the world track and field championships in Athens where Ximena Restrepo made the finals and Mauricio Velez and I managed to beat almost all the women except the ones from East Germany. I then went to Brown University where I shared a suite with a man who invented his own language and believed that he was the reincarnation of Elvis Presley. I wrote and photographed for the Brown Daily Herald and worked in the animal care facility where I developed a highly antagonistic relationship with a colony of macaque monkeys. I also studied neuroscience and computer science and worked in a laboratory with a woman called Dennie who had severe intestinal problems. Along the way I became a pretty good biophysicist. At various points during my time at Brown, I worked as an orderly at a Colombian hospital, an intern at the World Health Organization and a programmer for a cactus growing company. One summer I walked from Cusco to Machu Pichu along the Inca trail with my mother.

I entered the neuroscience Ph.D. program at Stanford to work with Richard Lewis because I wanted to make movies of calcium in cells. I wrote software to control our data gathering system. When they were about to cut my funding I developed a machine to study immune cells that resulted in several well-known papers in the journal Nature. I became a moderately famous academic. I pioneered the use of the foam mattress to take naps in between experiments. I taught biology to Latino students in East San Jose and I