

Ramon at Columbia University Medical Center.

I am a Yale nurse

As a very young child, Ramón Lavandero '79, president of the YSN Alumnae/i Association, was taken along on hospital rounds by his physician grandfather in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Although his grandfather died when Ramón was four, the value of a profession in health care was imprinted on the boy.

BY **LEAH J. NERO '08**

After a stint as a volunteer emergency department orderly at Euclid-Glenville Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio while a high school junior, Ramon also worked as a nursing assistant caring for patients with terminal cancer at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx during two years of study in the seminary. He followed this with two years at Doctors' Hospital in Miami, where he worked as an emergency department and ICU patient care technician while a liberal arts major at the University of Miami.

But it was Ramón's childhood family physician and mentor from Puerto Rico who pointed the way into the nursing field for Ramon. Dr. Reinaldo Ferrer, who had become medical director at New York City's Beth Israel Medical Center, challenged Ramón, telling the young man, "I'd like for you to finish college and go to medical school, but I know you've always been more interested in nursing." So he introduced Ramón to the legendary Rose Muscatine Hauer, chief nursing officer and director of Beth Israel's diploma nursing school.

Ramón recalls how Miss Muscatine, as she was fondly known, brought it all into focus. "You could come to our school, but what you

really need is your bachelor's degree and then your master's," she directed. That led to Ramon's admission in 1970 to Columbia University as one of the first two male nursing students there.

After practicing as a hemodialysis and transplant staff nurse at the New York Hospital for one year, Ramon became manager of Montefiore Medical Center's renal service. The need for a graduate degree became obvious as his interests diversified beyond his initial passion for direct patient care. "I decided to equip myself with clinical and academic credentials that would let me hold clinical, education or management positions no matter where the road ahead might take me," he says.

Then after earning a master's degree from Columbia's Teachers College, Ramón earned his graduate degree in nursing from YSN in 1979. While at YSN, he studied in the acute care (then called medical-surgical) program, with a renal subspecialty, while he worked part-time in the coronary care unit at Yale-New Haven Hospital, where Marge Funk and Cathy Winkler also worked (see story on page 23).

Ramón gravitated away from clinical practice into administrative and faculty positions

after graduation from YSN, first at Milwaukee's Mount Sinai Medical Center and then at Thomas Jefferson University and Hahnemann University Hospital in Philadelphia.

Motivated by the YSN expectation that graduates become professionally involved leaders, he became active in the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and was elected to AACN's national board of directors as well as its credentialing arm, the AACN Certification Corporation.

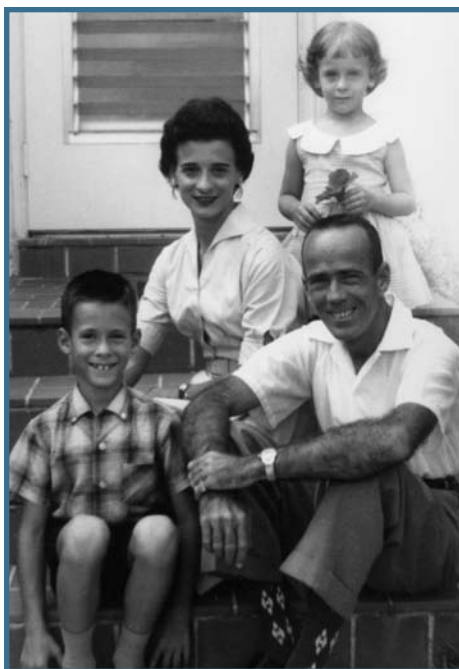
In 1989, Ramón joined the AACN's national staff and served for eight years as director of external affairs and development. In 1997, he became the first director of the International Leadership Institute at the Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International. After three years, he returned to AACN where he works today as director of development and strategic alliances.

What has changed since Ramón's student days at YSN? "The most obvious change," he says, "is that there are fewer nurses, since most students are admitted through the GEPN program." He believes that a balance of RN and GEPN students leverages one of the school's greatest strengths; that each group learns from the other's perspectives and experience.

"The challenge rests in making curriculum more accessible and the financial burden more manageable for RNs," he explains. "The new nursing management, policy and leadership master's program is addressing this by testing the effectiveness of distance learning in YSN's academic culture. Financial support is an even greater challenge and one where support from alumnae/i will be essential." More acute care students also would reflect the reality of health care today, he says.

Ramón reconnected with YSN two years ago when alumna Angela Barron McBride '64, suggested that he become involved with the Alumnae/i Association. Dr. McBride served on an alumnae/i Task Force convened by immediate past president Carol Ann Wetmore and former Dean Catherine Gilliss to engage alumnae/i as active participants in taking the university to the next level of excellence as a global leader in nursing education.

"The panel recommended key changes in the association's activities and role," Ramón explains, "and in the board's structure and representation." All of the changes were designed to streamline the organization and support involvement by a broader range of graduates. The board now includes women and men from 14 class years representing varied ethnic and



Ramon and his family.

racial groups and living in eight states. A representative from the Student Government Organization is also a voting member. To ensure planned leadership succession, each year at the annual meeting alumnae/i select a current or past board member to serve as president-elect for one year. Bonnie Baloga-Altieri '89, elected in October, will succeed to the presidency this fall.

The panel's report prompted other enhancements. In 2005, YSN reunion weekend was moved from summer to fall. "Excellent attendance and a dynamic program made it very successful," Ramón says, "and students could participate because classes were in session. The 2006 reunion will be held October 6–8th and we expect record breaking attendance to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the

midwifery program and the 80th anniversary of the first graduating class."

Such contact has expanded with an alumnae/i-student mentoring program launched in 2004 which pairs incoming students with an alum who might be able to meet the student in person or communicate by phone, e-mail or postal mail. "Our goal is to match every student with an alum," explains Susan Bonini '89, the board's secretary-treasurer who coordinates the program. "We're seeking connections that will deepen over time because they're based on shared interests and goals. What we need are more alumnae/i willing to participate." She advises those interested to contact Lisa Hottin for more information (see contact details, below).

Ramón reflects on the value of alumnae/i connection, "It's ultimately about being a Yale Nurse," he says. "When you graduate, you're only at the doorstep of becoming one. On the long haul, being a Yale Nurse may mean something different for each of us. But it always signals excellence and is a source of great pride because being a Yale Nurse matters."

I am a Yale Nurse. *What does that mean for you?* Ramón invites alumnae/i far and near to send their responses to him via email (ramon@aya.yale.edu), or to YSN's Director of External Relations, Lisa M. Hottin who can be contacted by phone at 203-785-7920 or by email (lisa.hottin@yale.edu).

Alumnae/i-Student Connections:
To participate contact Lisa Hottin.



Ramon with YSNAA board member at 2004 alumnae/i event.