

Wong López, Manuel (1949–2015)

MIREYA ESTELA RODRÍGUEZ

Mireya Estela Rodríguez Botacio, M.A. in education (Andrews University, Michigan, U.S.A.), M.Sc. in educational administration (Universidad Adventista de Centro America “UNADECA,” Alajuela, Costa Rica), worked as a teacher and director of the School of Education and retired from the Adventist University of Central America. In addition, she was the director and editor of the *Episteme Magazine* published by the UNADECA School of Education. She and her husband have three children and seven grandchildren.



Manuel Wong López

Photo courtesy of Lesbia Raquel Jaen Torres.

Manuel Wong López was an Adventist philologist, professor, and researcher from Panama.

Early Years

Manuel Wong López was born January 30, 1949, in the capital of the Republic of Panama. His parents were the prosperous merchant Benjamin Wong Sam (1908-1953) and Isabel López (1923-2017). He had five brothers and two sisters and spent his childhood mostly in the Panama City area, Corozal, Calidonia and Mayor Díaz¹ At birth he suffered a Spastic Paraparesis, and physicians told his mother that he would grow up with a physical disability and never learn to read or write.

For his primary studies he attended the Republic of China School. It initially accepted him as an auditor, because of his physical disability. Despite his situation, he was noted for his dedication. He started his secondary education at the Bolívar Institute, continuing it at the National Institute, both in Panama City, and completed it at the Colegio Vocacional de America Central (COVAC), Alajuela, Costa Rica. After Bible studies in Panama with Mrs. María de los Ángeles Polanco de Yueng and Claudia Luthas, he attended an evangelistic series in Panama. When Pastor Bendell Archbold, then president of the Inter-American Division, called for those who wished to give their lives to Jesus, Manuel was the only one who responded. Later Daniel Moncada baptized him in the Castellana Church.²

Education and Marriage

Upon finishing his secondary studies at COVAC, Wong continued his higher education. A tireless student, in 1977 he obtained a bachelor's degree in educational administration from the State Distance University, in Costa Rica. Then he earned a Ph.D. in linguistics from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma (UNA) in 1996 with recognition for his high marks. In 1971, in the Castellana Church, he met Lesbia Raquel Jaén Torres, whom he married January 11, 1976, in Panama City. Lesbia obtained a degree in primary education from the Centro Adventista de Estudios Superiores (CADES), Alajuela, Costa Rica.³

Manuel then finished his bachelor's degree in primary education through an extension program from Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1985. He worked as a teacher at the Adventist School of Colon, Panama, and at the Autumn Miller School, Alajuela, Costa Rica. Twins were born to the family. Son Dr. Manuel Wong Jaén now has a specialty in cardiothoracic surgery with a subspecialty in lung transplantation and a doctorate in surgery and morphological sciences; and daughter Fanny Isabel Wong Jaén (M.Sc.) is a pediatric clinical neuropsychologist.

Career/Ministry

Manuel Wong López began his career as a professor at the Instituto Adventista de Panamá (IAP), Chiriquí, Panama, during the school year of 1975/1976. Next, while continuing to study on his own, he served as professor and librarian at the Centro Adventista de Estudios Superiores (CADES), Alajuela, Costa Rica, from 1977 to April 1985. Until 1992 he devoted himself completely to university teaching at CADES and then UNADECA. During the following seven years (1993-1999) he served as director and professor of the School of Education at UNADECA.

Because his passion was teaching, he returned to the classroom as a full-time professor from 2000 to 2013. He wrote several articles, including one on the functions of language in the transmission of Christian beliefs and values for the June 2004 issue of magazine *Christ in the Classroom*, published by the Institute of Christian Education of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.⁴

Dr. Wong gave the name *EPISTEME* to the magazine of the UNADECA's School of Education and served as editor from its beginning until his death.

Last Years and Contribution

Retiring at the end of 2013, Manuel Wong Lopez died at the Calderón Guardia Hospital in San José, Costa Rica, on January 14, 2015.

His vast knowledge ranked him among the most outstanding linguists of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Inter-American Division. Manuel's classes were lively, but full of great intellectual content. In addition, his love for books led him to support the school's library throughout his stay at UNADECA. For this reason and for his intellectual career, on December 15, 2014, the institution named the library after him.

Source

Wong, Manuel. "Desafíos para la educación redentora." *Revista Educación*, vol. 6, 1997. Accessed July 15, 2019, <http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/sp/jae1997sp062902.pdf>.

NOTES

1. Manuel Wong (son of Manuel Wong Lopez), interviewed by Mireya Esela Rodríguez Botacio, Alajuela, June, 18, 2019; Jaén Wong and Lesbia Raquel, interviewed by the author, Alajuela, June 20, 2019.
2. ² Jaén Wong and Lesbia Raquel, interviewed by Mireya Esela Rodríguez Botacio, Alajuela, June 20, 2019.
3. ³ Ibid.
4. ⁴ Manuel Wong, "Desafíos para la educación redentora," *Revista Educación*, vol. 6, 1997.

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