

COUNTDOWN TO BOSTON

18 DAYS



## "S" is for Schor and Statues

An odd coupling on the face of it. And yet, not so odd when you stop to think about how central, how iconic even, Nina Felice Schor is within the narrative history of child neurology and the Child Neurology Society in the 21st century. As Scientific Program Chair in charge of organizing the 2000 annual meeting in St. Louis and the 2001 meeting in Victoria during Mike Painter's presidency, she shaped the basic program contours that pertain to this day. As Secretary-treasurer from 2004-2010 she served on the Executive Committee during the presidencies of Jim Bale, Ann Tilton, John Bodensteiner and Donna Ferriero. She was President of the CNS from 2013-2015 when the CNS reached its \$1 million goal for endowing the Philip R. Dodge Young Investigator Award and the Child Neurology Foundation dusted itself off, got back on its feet and recommitted itself to pursuing a path toward effective, complimentary partnership with the CNS. She was honored in 2017 with presentation of the Hower Award and gave a memorable lecture following a near-equally memorable introduction by her twin sons, Jonathan and Stanford.



I hardly need retrace the career path in research, teaching, mentorship, and administration that took her from being Chief of the Division of Child Neurology in the Department of Pediatrics, and Associate Dean for Medical Student Research at the University of Pittsburgh, to Chair of the Department of Pediatrics and Pediatrician-in-Chief at the University of Rochester Medical School, to her current position as Deputy Director of the NINDS. Many of you know her better as, or have worked with her more directly in her role as a Director of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) or lead chair of one of several key committees within the ANA, AAN, AMSPDC,

SPR or various NIH study groups. All of that is well known. But, even better known, perhaps, are the personal, non-professional/non-CV entries that are equally, if not more remarkable relative to her peers: her incomparable character and incandescent charm; her thoughtful attentiveness and probing intelligence, her innate kindness and compassion. She is, some have said (myself included) both one of the brightest and nicest human beings on the planet. She is, well...."perfect," many say; "she should have a statue erected in her honor."



Longtime friend, Pat Crumrine (L) shares a laugh in Vancouver with Nina. The two friends ran against each other for CNS President in 2013 and are featured on the CNS in a great video conversation, “The Three Amigas”, with past-President, Ann Tilton.

***Click to view video.***

Nonsense, I say. Sheer nonsense. In an age more noted for tearing down statues than erecting them, we should pause before indulging in any kind of loose talk about erecting more statues. Particularly in this case. Because, I can tell you from long experience, Nina is not perfect.

Start with this: we used to have weekly noontime meetings by phone when she was CNS President. I can clearly recall three times when she kept me waiting, once for more than 5 minutes. And then there was that time she forgot to cc me on an email. Trifles, you say? OK, let’s take it up a notch and ask a few harder questions about more substantive matters.



“*Nina makes everyone around her better,*” many say. Really? How would being willing to run through a wall for her, something many (including me) have said many times, make them “better”? Ask Chris Giza and the TBI specialists at UCLA what they think about that before answering.

“*She’s so focused and disciplined,*” others say, wishing they could emulate her. “Focused and disciplined”? She writes poetry, for crying out loud! She played in a klezmer band! And don’t even get me started on the splendid grand piano in her house that she spends an awful lot of her time playing; beautifully, yes, but shouldn’t she be reading case studies posted on some obscure Eastern European on-line journal? Where, one wonders, would the CNS be if other Presidents spent their time stroking the ivories? Time better spent, say, on Capitol Hill meeting with fellow-physician, Rand Paul, working on meaningful vaccine and child healthcare legislation?

“*She’s a great judge of character and mentors her trainees and colleagues wisely and patiently*” Uh huh. Mike Painter mentored her, counseling patience and humility that had her charting a 16-year path forward from scientific program chair in 2001 to CNS Executive Committee in 2004 to President in 2013 to Hower Award in 2017 and appointment as Deputy Director of NINDS the same year. Did she then turn around and provide the same wise and steadying counsel to her Scientific Program Chair, Jon Mink? Hardly. Appointed program chair in 2013, Jon became CNS

President in 2017 and Hower Awardee in 2021: an 8-year sprint covering the same ground in half the time. That's a lot of pressure. What does Nina suggest he do next? Drop the mike after finishing his Hower lecture on Saturday, pack the car, drive south and walk into Francis Collins' office at the NIH on Monday, muttering irritably, "I was hoping it would be bigger, but I guess this will do"?

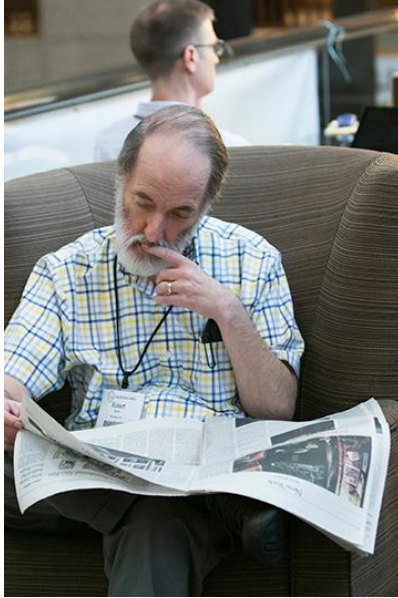


*"She is knowledgeable about CNS history, has no ego, and is sensitive to members' needs and interests."* Oh, please. How sensitive was she as President in 2014 when the CNS met in Columbus, Ohio, triggering untold trauma among members from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, site of the 1st CNS Annual Meeting? Seven years and six consecutive losses later, I know of one Wolverine who continues to undergo serious therapy that includes having his picture taken in front of the Buckeye's stadium wearing a maize and blue "M" cap. Mike Painter was a proud Michigan alumni; maybe this is petty payback for having her wait twice as long as she needed to, apparently, to stockpile all those offices and accolades.

*"She models work-life balance in ways I wish I could"* People: we've already covered this. Remember the poetry and piano-plinking? While I hesitate to call anyone's parenting into question, I have to wonder how her twin sons became or remained so over-protected and insecure that when one enrolled on the opposite side of the country in the MD-PhD program at Stanford, the other enrolled in the MD-PhD program at UCSF, less than an hour's drive away.



Her spouse, Bob, it's true, is an absolute treasure. He is, by far, my favorite vestibular neurophysiologist; I can't imagine going to a CNS meeting without sharing at least one thoroughly delightful conversation with him in the



hallway or at a reception. And he provides a good check on what some cultists might consider Nina's engaging exuberance, but others are willing to label "lack of judgment" or "pandering." I'm 100 per cent certain it was Bob who suggested she remove the small hand-made sign "Will work for government wages" before taping a video with her future boss, NINDS Director, Walter Koroshetz at the CNS meeting in 2015.

## ADVICE, FUTURE, MENTORS AND MENTORING, RESEARCH

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*"She's so respectful of her elders."* That's not my impression. When she and Donna Ferriero were asked by two elderly members to hang up their coats at an ANA Annual Meeting years ago, mistakenly assuming they were hotel staff rather than ANA members ("When did we start admitting women?"), did she dutifully do so, or did she merely gently point them in the right direction? What about the time an elderly gentleman approached her at a Yale Alumni gathering and asked what year her husband graduated, innocently unaware or in denial about Yale going coed in 1969. How tough would it have been to simply respond, "1975," and let him totter away, none the worse off for not realizing it was she who graduated Yale that year?

And why, when everyone else indulged Fred Plum's penchant for playing the role of intimidating elder sage, did she feel compelled to break protocol, calmly and confidently answering his query about what field she wanted to enter: "Child Neurology." His grim riposte, "Young lady, you are entering neurology through the basement!" got her dander up, confirming her resolve to go into the still young, developing and underappreciated field. But, really, isn't 30 years an awful long time just to stubbornly prove a point? Is that respectful? Or, more importantly, Is that the kind of mature decision-making process residents and young attendings should be emulating? I don't think so. (Note: I am grateful she did. That anecdote inspired me to use as the working title of our growing collection of videotaped CNS Conversations on the website, "The Basement Tapes"; with a nod to Bob, of course).

So you see: she's not perfect. Not even close. And we shouldn't be talking about erecting a statue in her honor. She is brilliant and she is delightful, and I am grateful to call her a friend. But I'm in

no rush to see her cast in bronze on some street corner in New Haven, Pittsburgh, Rochester or Bethesda, with graffiti sprayed all over its base, “Justice for Fred Plum!” or “Free Jon Mink!”

Until tomorrow (the Letter “R”)

Roger

Roger Larson, CAE  
Executive Director

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### On-line Registration is Open!

Registration is now open for the long awaited 50th Golden Anniversary Meeting of the Child Neurology Society in Boston. Registrants attending this milestone meeting live and in-person in Boston will want to register early (some sessions are limited and reservation-only). You will also want to book hotel rooms ASAP. A link and access code to the Sheraton Boston Hotel will be included in your registration confirmation email.

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### 2021 CNS 50th Annual Meeting

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