Dear friends and colleagues:

About two years ago, shortly after the last International Workshop on Orthogonal Polynomials (IWOP) held in Leganés my good friend Paco Marcellán announced to me that the next edition would be dedicated to my 60-th birthday. I was deeply surprised because I didn't see there was anything to celebrate about it.

Let me say some words to put things in place. Shortly after returning to Cuba from the States, back in 1963, I started to attend a junior High School in Havana. There, I met a beautiful and charming young girl named Maria Elena that swept me off my feet. In her own words, my proficiency in English led her to think that I had a future and decided to conquer me. It was an easy task because from the very first moment I was helpless in her presence and completely lost in her absence. Then we were 14. After 4 years, we got married, and last Sunday the 7th of September we celebrated the 40th anniversary of our wedding. Without her love, support, and dedication, I would not be who I am today. So, this celebration is as much hers as it is mine. If for no other reason, having had the opportunity to share our lives together gives sense to having returned to Cuba then. We have three wonderful children: Dayami, Inti, and Abey, that have kept us busy all these years. They have been our joy and the source of strength to struggle for a better life. This brings us to Spain where we were able to provide for them the future they deserved.

My second love has been mathematics. I can't say exactly when it started to fascinate me, but I know it was before I was 10 trying to understand the algorithms of the simple mathematical operations first with integers and then with fractions. From junior high I have special memories of Mr. White who taught me the elements of algebra and linear equations and Luis Triana who introduced me to plane geometry. I obtained a scholarship for a special senior High School. The teachers were good, but the students were outstanding, and this enriching environment prepared me for the university. At the School of Mathematics at Havana University two persons influenced me mostly. Miguel Jiménez who taught me all the real analysis I know and introduced me to research giving me hard problems to solve, and Claude Mutafian a french-armenian who was a Visiting Scholar. He taught me complex analysis and in a joint project with several students we wrote a book on Multilinear Algebra. Soon after graduation I obtained a scholarship to do my Ph. D. in the former Soviet Union. I had the privilege of being a student of Academician A. A. Gonchar. It is difficult to explain in few words the impact that this experience had in me. He and the students that surrounded him created an atmosphere difficult to match. At first, in the seminar, I could hardly understand what

was going on (and the russian wasn't the biggest difficulty). They talked about Stieltjes, Markov, Hadamard, Fabri, Carleman and others as if they were their neighbors and I was sure that despite my gook grades I had been sleeping in class back at the university. The gap slowly disappeared. Gonchar's guidance and seeing the team work and discuss at the blackboard had the greatest effect in my professional career. Since then, I consider myself part of the school Gonchar created.

During my travels, specially when I have been with my family, I have received countless support from friends in many ways. Special thanks are due to Tania and Valery, Lena and Sasha, Emiliana and Juan Jesus in Moscow, Didi in Bremen-Germany, Ana and Amilcar from Portugal, Rosa and Paco, Maria del Carmen and Chicho, Dolores and Jose Luis, Laura and Nacho here in Spain, who have opened their homes and hearts to receive us. Paco and Rosa deserve special mention. They not only opened the doors of their home for us, Paco opened for me a new country, a family of friends from all corners of this land, and a place to work where I've been treated with courtesy and respect. Paco's initiative to dedicate this IWOPA to my birthday received enthusiastic support from the Rector of this university and the Director of the School of Engineers and I appreciate their thoughtfulness.

Thank you Andrei Aleksandrovich for introducing me to the classics of the "Complex World" all of us here live in, having them accept me as a colleague, and make me feel they were also my friends. Thank you Jenia for your precious result on ratio asymptotic, Paul and the Hungarian gang for your extension of Szegő's theory. E. M. Nikishin for your astonishing systems of measures. Herbert, Vili, Ed, Walter, Doron, and Barry, for having offered us stimulating books. In short, I thank all of you that have revolutionized in the past 40 years the theory of orthogonal polynomials and rational approximation in the complex plane with far reaching results, ideas and methods; also, those who have deposited their confidence in me sharing my research, students and colleagues alike. Thank you for the kind words I have herd during the conference concerning my work. I hope that at least they are partially deserved.

My final words go to my parents. They not only gave me birth but also the courage and confidence to undertake the hardships of life. My turbulent life deprived me from being at their side during their last days and taking them to their final resting place. This is hard to forget or forgive. I wish they were here to offer them as present the magnificent sight of this group of friends celebrating an event for which they are fully responsible.

Thank you very much.

Guillermo López Lagomasino