The Passing of A Legend - Rosario La Corte: 1929-2024
By Joseph Ferdenzi

On April 8, 2024, Rosario La Corte died quietly in his home surrounded by family. He was 95. With his passing, the aquarium hobby lost one of the greatest aquarists of this generation or any generation. It truly represents the end of an era that none of us will ever see again.

Rosario was born on March 16, 1929, in New Jersey to parents who were both immigrants from Sicily. His father, also named Rosario, was an avid gardener, and the junior Rosario developed an early interest in all things having to do with nature.

This love of nature truly blossomed after his service in the armed forces and his marriage to his beloved Jeanie in 1951 (Jeanie survives him). While living in the family home in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Rosario began his fantastic journey into the world of aquariums and tropical fish.
In the mid-1950s, Rosario became one of the few to spawn the fabled Neon Tetra (*Paracheirodon innesi*). This event catapulted him to the attention of his local aquarium clubs. Eventually, this resulted in him being cajoled into giving a program about the Neon Tetra spawning. This first program (which he was very nervous about giving) led to decades of speaking engagements for Rosario at clubs and conventions across the United States and Canada.

And, the spawning of the Neon Tetra led to many other notable spawnings of all kinds of fish. Many of those spawnings were the first of their kind in America, if not the world. This ever increasing fame resulted in a demand for him to write articles. Thereafter, his pieces appeared in many aquarium magazines for decades. In the late 1960s, when Earl Schneider created the famous Pet Library series of booklets, Rosario authored no less than four of the aquarium books in that series: “Enjoy Your Barbs,” “Enjoy Your Cichlids,” “Enjoy Your Tetras,” and the slightly larger “Know Your Egglayers.” No one wrote more booklets for the series than Rosario.
At the same time, Rosario was breeding hundreds of fish and raising thousands of fry in the converted two-car garage behind the house in Elizabeth. Hobbyists from all over the world came to see this amazing fish house. They were never disappointed.

I know what they saw because I got a glimpse of it when I frequently visited his second home in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey. First, Rosario raised fish of superior quality. His fish always displayed vivid colors and finnage that was simply outstanding. Rosario worked hard to accomplish that and he took great pride in it. Even today, there is a rainbowfish in the hobby, *Melanotaenia boesemani*, that hobbyists refer to as La Corte’s Boesemani because of the vivid yellow/orange he bred into that fish! Second, when Rosario bred a fish, he didn’t just have 20 or 50 fry. Usually, he’d have hundreds! To see such a massive amount of young fish was simply stupefying.
As if all of the foregoing was not enough to make him a legend, Rosario went on several collecting trips to South America. One of the first trips in the late 1950s was with none other than Herbert Axelrod, the founder and publisher of Tropical Fish Hobbyist magazine. Indeed, that trip was documented in the pages of the magazine. On later trips, Rosario either discovered or introduced new species to the hobby. Rosario had many friends in South America due to another habit that distinguished Rosario – he was a prolific letter writer and corresponded with a wide variety of hobbyists, from beginners to the most famous aquarists of the day.
Between his aquariums and his exotic collecting trips, Rosario became adept at spotting new species of fish. He was especially proud to have Rainbow Emperor Tetra (*Nematobrycon lacortei*) and an exquisite annual killifish (*Maratecoara lacortei*) named in his honor.

As I write this I am painfully aware that I have only given you some of the highlights of his legendary contributions to the aquarium hobby. Hence, I strongly urge all of you who have not yet read his fabulous autobiography, *An Aquarist’s Journey* (published in 2018 by the Greater City Aquarium Society, New York), to acquire a copy (it is available on Amazon). The book is a one-of-a-kind encapsulation of a golden age in our hobby, complete with numerous photos, and a bibliography of all of Rosario’s publications through the decades.

Above and beyond Rosario’s reputation as a great hobbyist, there is Rosario’s reputation as a great man. Despite the pressures of raising a family of five children, along with the demands of raising and selling quality fish (the proceeds of which paid for the investment in the fish and helped supplement the family income), Rosario was patient and kind to everyone who crossed his path. He was, in a phrase, the consummate gentleman. His badge was integrity, his word forged in unbreakable iron. No one who had any contact with Rosario ever came away with anything but admiration.
The history of our hobby had been burnished by men and women of incredible talent and honesty. A giant among them was Rosario La Corte. We will never see another like him.