

MEMORIES FOR MARGARITA



SHARP LAB REUNION 2014

How does one say thank you to someone who has been a daily colleague, friend and helper for 40 years? Perhaps a simple “thank you for being Margarita” is the most appropriate. You have been “Margarita” for all of my students and fellows over the years. You have also been “Margarita” to my family and colleagues across the world. Frequently at a meeting, some one will approach me to thank you for being so helpful and nice. I have carried presents from these colleagues back to the office for “Margarita”. I know that my work at MIT would not have been possible without “Margarita”.



How did this all start? You became my assistant when I opened the laboratory in the Center for Cancer Research in 1974. At first, you spent the morning in Salvador Luria’s office and then the afternoon on the 5th floor of the Center. At the time the only scientist in the lab was Jane Flint who moved with me from Cold Spring Harbor but shortly thereafter Arnold Berk and Sue Berget arrived as fellows and as well as Dan Donoghue, Connie Cepko and Ihor Lemischka as graduate students. Soon you became my full time assistant and maintained my schedule, typed and edited most of the papers, prepared grant applications and reports and generally ran the lab.

The two photos show an evening where Ann and I entertained Koji Mitsugi at our home in Newton. We are on the deck outside in a lovely summer evening, talking after having finished dinner. The pictures show Margarita, Koji and Ann; and in the other, Ann, Margarita, my daughter Lena, and myself. At the time of the pictures, Koji was my counterpart at Ajinomoto, a Japanese company making amino acids, which had a relationship with the Center. Koji, long since retired, has remained a friend over three decades, sending pictures of travel, reports of his family and sketches of landscapes. As the pictures indicate, you have been part of my science, leadership and family for four decades. Thank you!



- Phil



October 12, 1993

Surprise Discovery About 'Split Genes' Wins Nobel Prize

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

FOR 15 years, Dr. Phillip A. Sharp's secretary kept a bottle of champagne refrigerated and ready for the day her boss at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology won a Nobel Prize.

Yesterday, Dr. Sharp and his secretary, Margarita Siafaca, popped the cork and drank the bottle of Moet & Chandon after he and Dr. Richard J. Roberts of New England Biolabs of Beverly, Mass., were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine by the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

"It tasted pretty good," Ms. Siafaca said. Discovery of Split Genes

The two scientists will share the \$842,000 prize for their independent discovery in 1977 of "split genes."

That discovery proved that genes can be composed of several separate segments. It shattered scientific dogma that had held that genes were continuous segments within DNA, the chemical basis of heredity. In making their discovery, the scientists worked in the laboratory with adenoviruses, which can cause colds and conjunctivitis, or pink eye.

Hiroshi Handa

I believe the best training I got was at MIT, in Phil Sharp's lab as a post-doc. There I had the chance to meet and work with some of the most brilliant people that I know. First there is the lab head Phil Sharp. Phil was a very young lab head at the time, when I joined as one of his post-docs, but I was very impressed by his science. Then there was Jim Manley, now a professor at Columbia University. He developed a cell-free transcription system by using mammalian cell lysates. These were originally called Manley extracts. I am very grateful that he generously took time to teach me his system thoroughly. Next, I also want to mention my good friend, Arnie Berk, a professor at UCLA. He was one of the pioneers of RNA splicing and viral transcription. He developed S1 nuclease mapping for biochemical analysis of RNA splicing. Furthermore, I appreciate the everlasting help given by Margarita Siafaca. All of the people in the lab had a significant impact and influence on my career, and I am very thankful that we are all still great friends even today. During my post-doc, I mainly worked on SV40 transcription and splicing by using Manley's transcription system and Berk's S1 mapping method in order to establish cell-free splicing system. In the end, I was not successful, because the specific activity of radioisotope-labeled probe was too low to be detected at the time. But I learned a lot about qualitative and quantitative aspects of in vitro biochemical experiments. During my time at MIT, through my work and through the people I was working with, I learned some very important lessons for my career. I learned that first, it is absolutely critical to have originality in science, and second, we should possess our own expertise and our own technique or technology. For example, Phil discovered splicing. That is very original. The Nobel Prize Committee thought so. And Jim and Arnie had established their own assays that would later be used in so many labs around the world. So I was inspired and determined to carry out only original research work and to create my own "Handa's bead technology".



From: The Editor
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Review of submission #3411214, Nature Cell Science

Summary:

The present manuscript, by Labrat et al., is a revised submission of a paper originally submitted in 1978, claiming to test the hypothesis that a combination of smart, dynamic, and hard-working students, postdocs and PI inevitably leads to scientific progress. The original paper was rejected due to concerns that the original experiment had not been repeated (hence a lack of statistical significance, as confirmed after a year of review by an external statistician), and by intuition on the part of the first reviewer that neither the Sharp lab nor any of its inhabitants conformed to the model of a "normal" research group. A negative decision was further pursuant to the unfortunate loss of the manuscript by the second reviewer in a game of three-card-monty in Vegas. Subsequent submissions in 1988 and 1998 were rejected due to a combination of statistical concerns, editorial ennui, and continued lack of three-card-monte success for the second reviewer.

The revised version of the manuscript presents considerably more data than the previous three submissions, based on additional years of the Sharp lab, also providing a new component of high-throughput data consisting of lunch bills for the past 40 years of Sharp lab sandwiches.

Evaluation:

While greatly improved, we still are unable to accept this paper.

First, a further year of analysis by an "external" statistician reveals that 40 is indeed an integer, and (in an unrelated matter) that the poor individual would prefer to be allowed "inside" after all of these years living in a shed in Shrewsbury, even if such a move entails loss of employment as an "external" statistical reviewer.

Second, the paper fails to take into account a major feature of the Sharp lab success over the past 40 years. This is the contribution of Margarita Siafaca. Were there other labs with dynamic and smart research advisors and students, but without Ms. Siafaca that also succeed at this level? We don't think so. Relevant information on such comparator groups needs to be provided in a supplement to the paper.

Third, the paper is rejected because we can no longer locate the second reviewer-- recent success at the poker table has apparently led to an early retirement and attempts to find anyone who can make sense of the earlier reviews have been unsuccessful.

Despite our current rejection of the paper, we strongly encourage the individuals to continue this important and ongoing study, and to submit revised versions with additional data in future decades.

Andy

Hi Margarita,

It has been awhile since you looked after me when I was in Phil's lab, but it actually doesn't seem that long ago (I won't count up the years). I just want to take this occasion to again thank you for all you have done. Kirsten and I are still waiting for you to come out to LA for a visit. We have a house now with two guest rooms, you are welcome at any time. As an added attraction, you won't need an alarm clock, we can have Red jump on your bed and wake you up at the appropriate time, though Red sometimes thinks 3AM is the appropriate time.

Love, Frank and Kat



Dear Margarita,

Thanks!

You were always the enabler - the glue that kept it all together, the arrow that could lead to solutions unforeseen, the source of knowledge to solve one's problems. The lab's inhabitants could never have thrived without you behind the scenes to guide us through those administrative regulations, to organize celebrations, to help to avoid disruptions.

More importantly, you were always there as a friend, to listen, to smile, to encourage, and to respond. Even when stressed out, or multi-tasking, you always found the time to be there to engage with anyone who came to your office.



Amazingly, even those many years after I left the Sharp lab and had my first daughter, you were there to babysit when Keith and I were in a pinch. She had a ball at your house. That book-loving girl turned

into a librarian; and the always inquisitive younger one, a scientist/teacher.

We have all aged (note grey hair!), but all remember.

Thanks for it all!

Ulla





Dearest Margarita:

Who would have ever thought: (a) that I would survive the several millicuries of radioactivity that I accidentally pipetted onto my shorts as a graduate student? (b) that I would be allowed to procreate? (c) that (despite said radioactivity) my children would have the correct number of limbs? Not me. But you did (or claimed to).

Margarita, you always had a warm smile for me no matter how annoying I was being. And sometimes you even laughed at my jokes. Most importantly, you always believed in us, nurtured us, and encouraged us. And for that, you are adored! You will always be at the very top of the collective heart of the Sharp laboratory.

With tons of love always,
Lewis

Dear Margarita,

I think it was only after my own lab grew that I truly appreciated in hindsight how much you did to keep the Sharp lab humming along. You were always such a reassuring presence for both of my sojourns in Phil's lab. It's been three decades (!!!) since I first showed up in the Cancer Center as the EM tech in 1975. Through it all, it has been so good to know that every time I returned for a visit, there was someone besides Phil who remembered who I was.

I couldn't find many pictures from my days in the Sharp lab, but here is one from around the time when I started my postdoc there in 1982 and also a couple of recent ones of me – one of me still (occasionally) getting to do bench science at Tufts and one of me doing the other thing I love.

My husband Chris also sends his warmest wishes.

Thank you for taking care of all of the Sharpies!

Olivia



1980'S



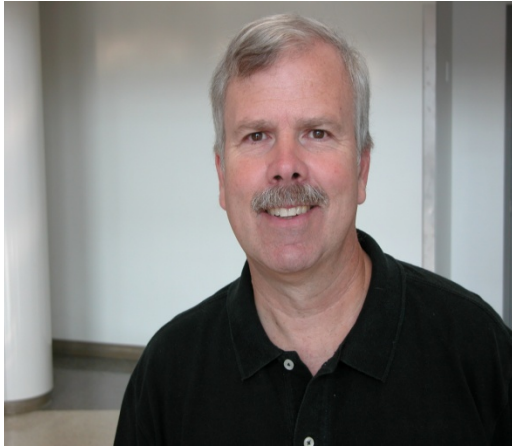
2012

Dear Margarita,

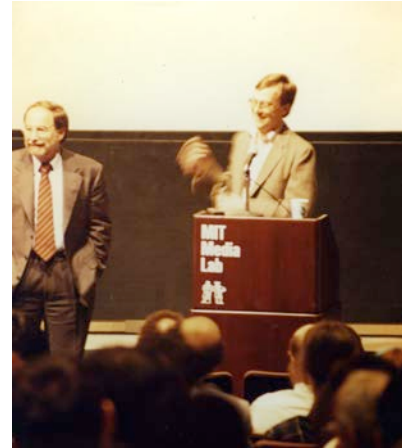
I want to thank you for the support and love that you have given to all of the former and present Sharp Lab members. You were/are always available to us to hear out a problem and to provide the support that we needed. While Phil provided a great lab environment for us to learn and mature, you were also extremely important during our years at MIT (and afterward).

Thank you!!!

Al



Margarita, you won't remember this, but when I was a new graduate student at MIT I was looking for a thesis lab and wanted to visit the Sharp Lab. I didn't know Phil at all yet, so I was completely intimidated (terrified might be a better word) about speaking to him. I remember my first time nervously dialing Phil's phone number (This was long before email!) to make an appointment, and secretly hoping he wouldn't pick up the phone. You can't imagine how relieved I was to be greeted by one of the friendliest, warmest voices I've ever heard. Not only did I get my appointment, I came away thinking the Sharp Lab would be a very welcoming place if all the members were equally nice!



P-50: Phil's 50th birthday symposium in 1994.



Steve and Robin at Steve's new Whitehead lab, 1990

After looking at a few other labs, I knew I was only interested in working with Phil.

Unfortunately, there was at least one other student who wanted to join the Sharp lab that year and Phil had told us he could only take one of us. He told me to give him a call in a few weeks after he had time to make a decision. Once again, I remember nervously dialing, thinking this conversation was going to be a pivotal moment in my career. And once again, your warm voice greeted me and instantly I felt more relaxed. Although you may not have known anything about why I was calling, you sounded so welcoming that I immediately felt very optimistic that the Sharp lab would be my new home. And within a few minutes after you transferred me to Phil's phone, I was the newest Sharpie!

In addition to being the warm welcoming face of the Sharp lab, you always helped us get our best science done and, even more importantly, written up for publication! Your calming presence helped us get through all the papers and grant deadlines, as you never seemed to panic (at least on the outside!) and always got the job done for us. Having worked with you on the Sharp Lab Reunion Symposia, I appreciate more than ever your irreplaceable value to Phil and to all his lab members!

With great appreciation and affection,

Steve Buratowski



Three Sharpies get Pew Scholar Awards in 1996!



Phil with Hiroshi Handa, Arnie Berk, and Steve Buratowski at a symposium in Japan, 2000.



Steve holding Julia soon after her birth in May 1992.



Steve and Julia (age 2) at the dinner at Phil's house for his 50th birthday.



The Buratowski Family 2013.



The first time I met Margarita

It must have been in August or September 1984. Phil had accepted me as a post-doc and I decided to visit the lab, to get to know it and to discuss potential projects. I combined my visit to MIT with a participation in the DNA Tumor Virus meeting at Cold Spring Harbor. It was a Big Feeling to enter 40 Ames Street, find the 5th floor and locate Phil's office. Phil wasn't there so Margarita took care of me. After a while I decided to go out in the lab and catch someone to talk to. Margarita cooled me down and said "Don't worry, they are nice kids". My immediate and relieved response was "Oh, and you are the Big Mama". Margarita looked at me and smiled. That smile said it all! Thank you Margarita for being the sunshine for me and I'm sure for all of us.

All the best from Anders and the family (Marie, Johan and Anton)
"on a sunny spot on the top of the world with a smile".



John Sedivy:

After looking through many pictures, I found this one from my and Alison's wedding on July 2, 1988. It was a beautiful Saturday morning at the house we rented in Watertown – and a good thing too, since it was to be an outdoor wedding. I'm afraid that after over 25 years in a damp basement drawer, the picture has lost some of its colors. But the memories of the Sharpie clan and Margarita remain as vivid as ever. Margarita was always a true friend and companion to all the crazy things we went through. She was someone I could always turn to for a sympathetic ear and even a word of sane advice. I feel truly comforted that my daughter Emma, who is just starting her MIT experience, will be close to Margarita (just across the hall, in fact), and will be able to rely on her friendship, affection and care.

Alison DeLong:

As a significant other, rather than a proper Sharpie, I was most frequently in the Sharp lab after a workday or on the weekend. That meant that a daytime visit during the week was a treat – I could stop in to visit Margarita, catch up with her news and enjoy her bulletin board of wonderful Sharpie photos. Margarita's warmth and humor and her affection for the members of the lab made every visit rewarding. Years later, it's still a highlight of Sharpie reunions to see Margarita and enjoy her company.



Some 26 years later . . .

Dear Margarita,

Thanks for being the force that held the Sharpie family together.

A picture to add to your collection with love from the Garcia-Blanco family.

Mariano, Rebecca, Alex, Olivia and Leah



“MARGARITA NURTURES THE SHARP LAB” - from Ken LeClair

I was excited when I learned that Phil had accepted me to be a postdoc in his lab and I was even willing to wait more than six months for some bench space to become available. In February of 1988, I was able to start lab work on 2 or 3 feet of bench in the first room, in the bay next to Lewis Chodos, while he was wrapping up his graduate studies. This was in the old cancer center, on the 5th floor of Bldg. E-17 on Ames Street. The current Sharpies work in some magnificent, state-of-the-art labs in the Koch Institute. Although I am a bit jealous that we didn't have such modern labs to work in, the old cancer center labs proved the point that you do not need beautiful, spacious labs to do great science. The productivity and scientific advances that came from those old labs are great testimony to the hard work, determination, excellence, and creativity of Phil and of all my amazing Sharp lab colleagues throughout the years.

While I certainly admire and respect Phil for all of his many scientific accomplishments, I cannot overemphasize how important Margarita was for me during my years in the Sharp lab. Phil would come and go, giving distinguished lectures at all the top universities and science conferences around the world. But Margarita was the constant presence in the office, holding down the fort, and keeping things running smoothly. Margarita was, and is, my confidant and friend. As much as I have enjoyed keeping in touch with Phil over the years since I left the lab, I take even greater pleasure visiting, calling and e-mailing Margarita to share family and career news. In fact, Margarita was responsible for some rare compliments I got from my teenage daughter, Annie. This incident was a few years ago when our family made a special trip to the MIT Museum to see the “*Sharpies - Lab Life*” exhibit. I had been sending Margarita some family pictures over the years, and it was cool to see how excited Annie got when she saw herself in photos on the display. But to be honest, my own daughter did have some trouble finding me in some of the other group pictures, because she did not recognize the young guy with brown hair!

Margarita, obviously, you deserve most of the credit for helping the Sharp lab operate all these years. But beyond just keeping the lab running and coordinating all of Phil's travels, you played another important role. You nurtured and counseled me and every other Sharpie, during our years in the lab and you made us all feel that we were important members of your extended scientific family. Beyond the science, you always cared how we were doing, and were always available for chats and to offer your wise advice. Your warmth and compassion was, and is, very much appreciated by me, and I am sure by all of my fellow Sharpies.

Thank You Margarita!

Margarita,

It is amazing to think that I have known you since 1988, when I was but a young and enthusiastic student, still marveling that I had been offered a spot at MIT and in the Sharp lab. On both fronts I felt somewhat unworthy.

Though I experienced the typical ups and downs of science and life during my days in the Sharp lab, one thing has always remained constant. You, Margarita, have remained the constant; calm, thoughtful, quick with a compliment, always interested in the highs and lows of my life and always with a warm and caring smile. Remember soup club, our oasis of “fine dining” within the confines of E17. And what fun David and I had over lunch with Katie when we took a trip to the CA coast.

Though I have had the wonderful opportunity to travel some, I have never lived outside of the greater Boston metropolitan area and that has meant that I have never been very far away from my scientific beginnings at MIT. It has also meant that I have never been very far away from you. And as it turns out, in my current role, I have never been very far away from the Sharp lab either.

The beauty of this is that it's been easy to stay connected with you and to keep you in my life. It is a treat for me to go with you to the theater, especially when we work in a meal as well. This gives us time to catch up on life, or share stories from years past. I am thinking of a particularly memorable day when we went to see Porgy and Bess (or was it Pippin) and had lunch at the Indian restaurant in the square. You told me about your early childhood and the family you had lived with. It gave me a beautiful window into your early world and some insight into how you have become the person you are.

Since I have no plans to move right now, I hope and anticipate that we will have many more opportunities to share a meal, some music and some conversation. You are a special person that we are all lucky to know you.

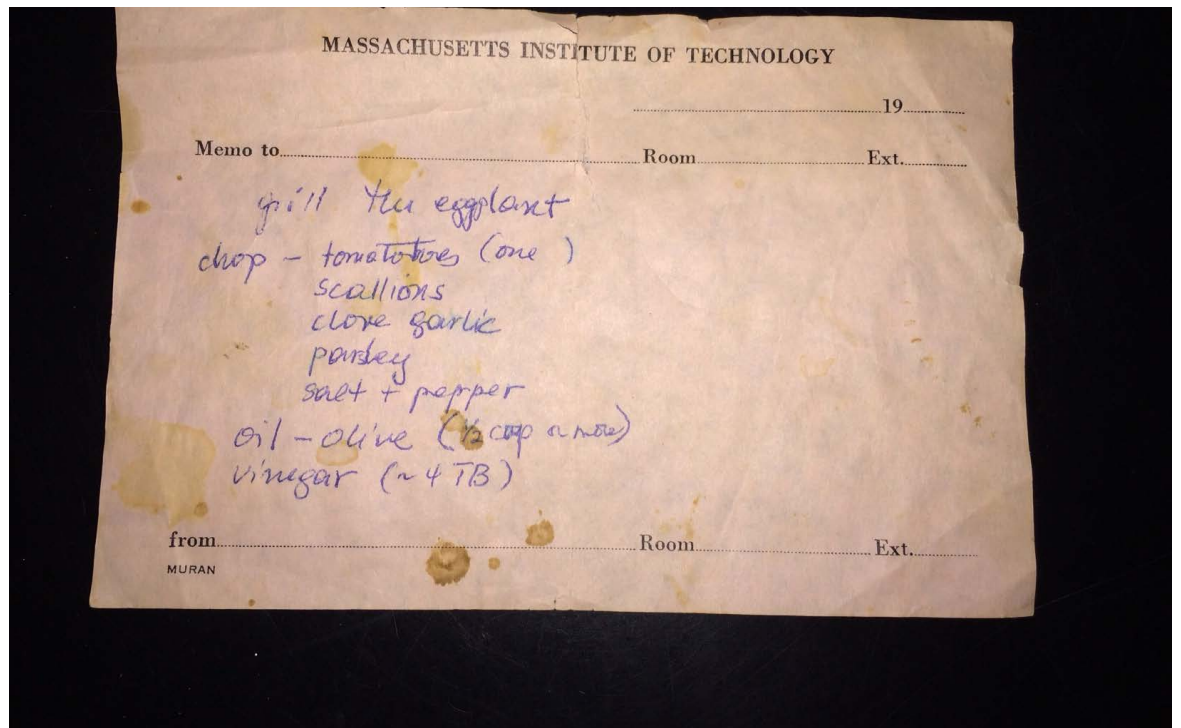
With love,

Rachel



Margarita has always made everyone feel at home and part of the Sharp Lab family. One of my most special memories of her from the time when I was a postdoc was a dinner she hosted for a group of us at her house. This was well before Phil had won the Nobel prize, but Margarita was already prepared – she showed us with pride the bottle of champagne she always kept in her refrigerator awaiting the big day. The other thing I remember about that meal was her amazing eggplant dip. I was so taken with it, that I got Margarita to jot down the recipe for me. As can be seen in the attached picture, the recipe has been well used and well loved over throughout the years. Every time I make it I always think about that special dinner with Margarita!

Melissa Moore



'If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me'

Margarita, this was the last sentence of the letter you have sent me 25 years ago. As far as I can recall this was also the first contact I had with you. As a native of Holland I was not used to such friendliness on a first encounter. From the tone of your letter I felt immediately that I would not be all by myself figuring out how to survive as a 'legal alien' in the far-away, fascinating but strange American society, which I only knew from television series. Your letter typified your cordial manner to make life easier and pleasant for foreign post-docs. Upon arrival on the fifth floor of E17 I was placed in the little office next to yours. You took me under your wings and gave me the assurance that I could always ask for advice, which you would give in your calm, composed and warm manner. Within days you created a home far away from home.

Starting during my post-doc at MIT we developed a warm friendship, which grew in the years to follow. Over these 25 years we had coffee together outside on Main Street, lunch in Legal Seafood, lunch in a sandwich shop, you invited me to stay in your home, a planned visit to the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam (?). This also reminds me of the Van Gogh reproduction of his Arles 'Bedroom' in your E17 office. The painting has bright colors and an odd perspective, which gives it a strange attraction. There are two pictures above his bed, one of a poet and one of a luitenant. The first version of 'The Bedroom' is part of the Van Gogh Museum collection in my home town, Amsterdam. While I remember that you liked this painting very much, I forgot what it was that you liked. Is it the bright colors, the perspective, the melancholic empty room, its tidiness, the 'expat' connection with Van Gogh, his tortured soul or the pictures of the poet and the soldier?



I have so many warm memories and a recent one stands out. When I started a family with Nicolet, we contributed as proud parents birth cards and family pictures to your famous photo-wall. When I visited the lab in 2010, you took me to the MIT museum to show your wall with 'Sharpie'-pictures. My sons were so proud to be on the walls of MIT and this visit brought back sweet memories and funny moments of 'all the time' I enjoyed being a Sharp post-doc. The P60 T-shirt has a Sharpie pen and the words 'marked for life'. Indeed and your words on the P70 card that 'we made lasting friendships, did great science and established our careers' are exactly to the point. And you, Margarita, are a major contributor to all of this. Thank you for all good care at MIT and your friendship thereafter.



Yours, *Marc Timmers*



It was some extraordinary years of my life and I have many great memories about Phil as a person.
I recall 2-3 sayings from Phil's lab around 1990:

“One gel a day keeps Phil away!”

And Phil’s comment when you showed him a gel with a not-so-clear result:

"I only pay for the real thing!"

On the other hand – if you had a really good result one could be lucky to experience "the Phil dance" where Phil literally danced around the lab for half a minute making giggling noises.

And how did we look those days?very intelligent indeed:



But maybe Phil’s best asset is his secretary Margarita – We love her!

Jørgen Kjems 1989-1991

Margarita Siafaca: An appreciation

Margarita's contributions to the lab over almost four decades and continuing even now are so substantial they deserve to be described in extreme terms. Here are some lasting impressions from the 90's.

- Margarita always anticipated, and completed without fuss, any administrative requirements for grant applications, job transitions, and travel. These tasks included remarkably prompt forwarding of letters of reference that had undoubtedly required deciphering and polishing of Phil's handwritten drafts.
- Her efficiency and focused purpose would not have been possible without her ultimately unwavering faith in the lab's important place in the development of modern molecular biology, in spite of times when that faith must have been challenged. Even then, her tireless commitment to the enterprise was manifest in long hours at the office, frequently exceptionally long.
- Such commitment was a great asset to all of us who would draw on her vast experience with the scientific community to anticipate the arc and of a professional career in biomedical research. If past is prologue, it was guaranteed comfort to hear her clear-eyed views, influenced by an old-world perspective, of scientific personalities and their potential as colleagues.
- The lab attracted its own unique personalities, and Margarita unfailingly ensured that the milestones and professional achievements of each were celebrated. Of course, the most spectacular of celebrations commemorated the Nobel award for which she had been a steadfast custodian of champagne for nearly twenty years.
- Personal achievements or sometimes difficulties were often attended by Margarita's boundless compassion and deft listening. Her intense caring was reflected in the treasured photos that adorned the office, the circumstance of each image vividly conjured to life by her remembrance.

Apparent in all of Margarita's many roles, this theme of caring has perhaps most sustained the lab's remarkable success. Congratulations!

Daniel Chasman
June 9, 2014



Margarita, you always make us Sharpies feel happy when we come by to talk with you.

-Chris, Mac and Sam Burge

Many things change over the years but your kindness and helpfulness remain the same.
We are ever indebted!

- Bill, Vicki and the girls

Now . . .



Then . . .

Grad school years

Dear Margarita,

I am so grateful to you. For me, you are the mother of the lab and have taken care of me like a mother to a daughter. Your office was the place to go when I had good news to share and frustrations to solve. Your wisdom, your advice, and your kindness have helped me grow. I wanted to thank you for everything that you have done, and say "I love you Margarita!"

Best wishes, Chonghui

Farewell lunch before my departure from the Sharp Lab, 2007



Chonghui working in the Sharp Lab





Margarita,

The Sharp Lab is a family to me, professionally and personally, and there is no doubt that you are the reason for that. You were always so kind to me when I needed it -- and I needed it a lot! -- at a time in life when I was struggling to figure out who I was and what I was doing as I transitioned into adulthood. In preparing for this reunion, I've had so much fun working with you again, a chance to reminisce and reflect on all the wonderful time we've had together.

With all our love,

John, Catherine, and Charlotte Doench

Dear Margarita,

You are a very special person for all of us, Sharpies. Although many years have passed since I left the lab, I always feel like I can go back through time and find the same comfort you gave me when I was there. Your heart is always open for us and I am sure we all want to give something back.

My most favorite moment in the Sharp lab was your surprise birthday celebration, when Phil canceled all his meetings and organized lunch at Legal's. We all did what we could to reach out to the Sharpie's community, and it was just amazing to see the constant flow of flower deliveries to your office. I have a very vivid memory of you surrounded by flowers, but, unfortunately, I did not have a picture of this. So, I made one up ☺.

Love,

Alla



A memory of 1/28/2005 in June 2014 (photo is from 2007).

Margarita!

What an amazing thing it was to come to graduate school, join Phil's lab, and have you there to keep us together, be our advocates, and love us as if we were family.

I feel blessed to have worked with you for those few years, and for all of the support you have given since.

You are our matriarch – without you we would not be “Sharpies” as we know them. Thank you for everything.

Wishing you the best,

Mauro

PS – my Mom and Dad give their best too!





Lab Life, *Sharpies*, Photo Mural Documenting Members of Prof. Phillip Sharp's Laboratory, 1974–2010

Fundamental to any understanding of MIT is the vibrant lab culture filled with graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from around the world. Every lab is different; every lab is the same. The research and methods are as varied as the imagination; the intensity, curiosity, ambition, and cleverness of the students are common across the board. One joins a lab to be trained in the business of advanced research from one's mentor as well as one's peers. The research, publications, patents, and projects undertaken in a given lab are vital assets for an individual's future career. Each lab forms an invisible college, a network of intellectual and social relations that shapes more than an individual scientist's career—these networks also shape the future of science and technology.

Visitors to Professor Phillip Sharp's old office on the fifth floor of building E17 always commented on the extensive collage of images created by his assistant Margarita Siafaca. The images here underscore the importance that Sharp—and all MIT faculty—place on training the next generation of researchers and scholars.



Margarita's photo collages were featured in the MIT Museum's exhibit celebrating 150 years of MIT. The display's goal was to show the special type of family that can arise when the right group of people come together to form a lab.

In the case of the Sharp Lab, the glue that has held the family together for the past 40 years is Margarita.

This display, while celebrating MIT as a whole, really celebrated the care and love Margarita has for all Sharpies, past, present, and future.

~ Mary Lindstrom



June 6th, 2014

Dear Margarita,

Thank you for all that you have done - Not only for getting things done but also promptly and orderly (even on vacation!!!). How fortunate for Phil and MIT CCR/Koch to have you as an administrator! I still remember vividly in the first few months at MIT, I emailed Phil for a letter and I kept waiting and waiting... Until a week before the deadline, I asked Phil again and only then did Phil tell you, you then plainly but kindly told me "Never forget to cc the one who does the job!". I never missed a beat after that.

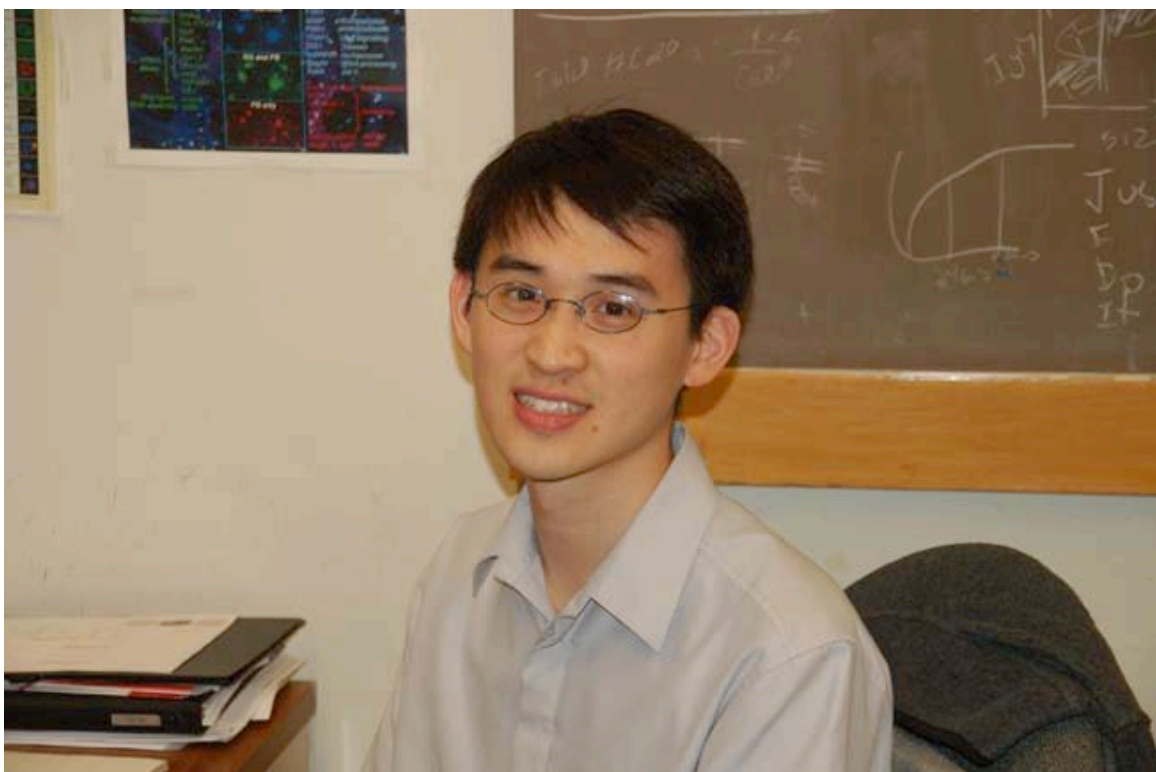
Thanks for being a good listener and for the warmth you provided whenever I came back to visit the lab. However, I think you have given me a hard time now – expecting to work with the likes of Margarita – professional, thorough and on-time.

May God bless you with abundance of health and happy moments!

Anthony Leung (2004-2011)



Anthony, Tun-Han, Oliver (7), Ellie (5) and Tobey (1)
@ Kenwood, MD 2014



As most new post-docs entering a lab I had no idea what to expect when I first arrived in the Sharp lab. I was excited and nervous all at the same time. For the first 2 months I didn't have a bench or a desk and so Margarita made me a little space at the desk in the office next to her. I spent those two months reading papers, figuring out what I was going to work on, and writing grants. What I always think about when recalling that time was the on-going dialogue between Phil and Margarita, which went something like this: "Margarita." "Yes, Phil." "Margarita." "Yes, Phil...." I never caught much of what Phil needed each time he asked for Margarita but I do remember hearing that exchange at least 100 times each day.

I soon realized why Phil was calling on Margarita so often. She made the lab run like a well-oiled machine. Soon I too began calling upon Margarita whenever I had a question about the logistics of my work. She always stopped what she was doing, was happy to help, and always knew the answer. After I put together my first grant Margarita told me to let her do it next time and for me to focus on the writing. She was a godsend! From that moment on I handed over what I had written and she got everything together, organized it perfectly, found all my mistakes, and sent it off for me on time. She thought me how important an administrative assistant is and I've never forgotten that.

Margarita very quickly became the first person I would go to talk with about everything. I'm sure I spent many hundreds of hours standing at her desk chatting with her during the course of my postdoc. I don't know how many times I would walk in to find Lourdes, Cathie, Mauro or Joel already there laughing with her when I walked in. We had so many wonderful conversations during that time. Over those 5 years she became a trusted friend and advisor.

I feel very fortunate to still be in the area so that I can get lunch with Margarita on occasion. Unfortunately, as life moves forward and work and family becomes busier, we aren't able to get together as often as I would like but she continues to be someone I turn to for advice. She's one of the most caring people I have ever met and she's one of my most precious memories from the Sharp lab. Thank you for being a mom to all of us Margarita!

Amy SeilaWhite



Thank You Margarita!

From Amanda, Nate, NJ, and Sam Young

Most of the best things that have happened to me in my adult life occurred during my time in the Sharp lab. My PhD work, defending my thesis, getting married, and having my first son NJ. The Sharp lab was like my second family, and was always supportive of me as a grad student and as a new mom.

The Sharp lab would not have been that way without you and your dedication to all of us. I will never forget all the stories you would tell of past Sharpies, and I am so happy that you have helped to bring us all together again for Reunion 2014!



Dear Margarita,

This invitation to write a page in a book for you is an outstanding opportunity to do something I should have done a long time ago – to directly thank you for everything that you do for the Sharp lab. I still remember arriving in 2004 as a bright-eyed and enthusiastic but somewhat naïve small town west coast boy, and all that you did to get me situated in the lab and the Center for Cancer Research. I remember a few years later – not exactly when - walking into your office and you telling me that I finally looked (appropriately) like a stressed out MIT postdoc. It certainly would have been much earlier if you were not there helping us along.

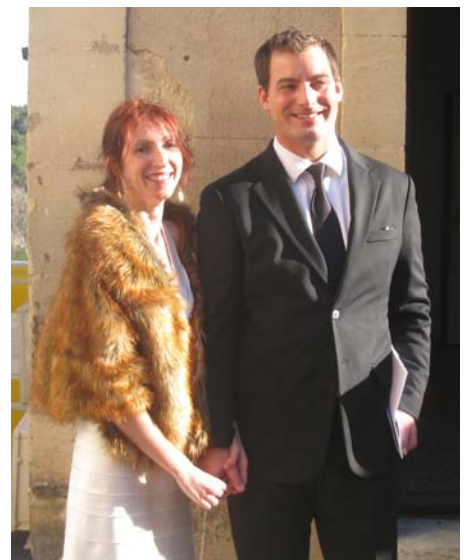
I don't know if I imagine it or not, but it seems to me that throughout my career the only thing that has kept me going is the friends that I am surrounded by. I had a very good set of friends as a graduate student – many of the other students and postdocs and I played softball two or three times a week in various leagues and there was never a dull or lonely moment. Moving out to Boston for me changed all that. Beyond the requirement of settling back in, I think that at least for me there is a fundamental difference between those on the West Coast and those on the East Coast that increases the effort in forming close personal relationships. Perhaps you noticed that I was always closest to Cathie Garnis and Grace Zheng, both from the Pacific Northwest. In any case, I was never able to build the support network in Cambridge that I had in earlier stages of my life. This is why I was so lucky that you are a part of the Sharp lab.

You work incredibly hard for both Phil and the laboratory, and I don't know what it might have been like for you to have a random postdoc pop in on occasion for conversations ranging from garbage that was not important to instruction on how to fill out a particular form or interact with a particular resource to just plain venting. Much of that is certainly not in your job description, and the thing that impresses me in retrospect is that no matter what the topic or my intent you always made time and I always walked out feeling better. This is a testament not only to your fundamental excellence in your official capacity, but also as a genuine source of wisdom and perspective. You were quite simply the easiest and most valuable person for me to talk to during my stay at MIT.

Beyond this, of course, I am eternally grateful to you for letting me steal cigarettes from you on particularly stressful days, and look back fondly upon the time that we carpooled to Phil's summer party on the Cape. It was some of the best conversation that I have had in a long time. Even though I am terrible at keeping in touch (ask my mother) you are often on my mind and very fondly remembered. I consider you an absolutely fantastic and indispensable friend. I respect and appreciate you, unequivocally, on every level.

With Best Regards,


Joel Neilson



Dear Margarita,

They asked me to write something special about you for this album. We remember you as a very kind, joyful, and sweet lady. From the beginning you were always there to help me out with all the difficulties I had in finding my way in the USA. Many people in the lab called you the “mother” of Phil’s lab and I really felt the same. It was always good to chat with you with a nice coffee and sweets.

Sabine and Lars still remember your special visit to our house. We dared to prepare Greek Moussaka and luckily you liked it. The kids are still reading “enemy Pie”, the book you gave as a present. What a great story. The kids are growing fast. Lars turned 11 and Koen (born in Cambridge) is 7 years old already. They are both very sweet and smart, and they bring a lot of joy. We still have good memories about the time in Phil’s lab and Boston area and we still miss it a lot. Hopefully, we are able to come over for holidays next year. For sure, we let you know!

All the best,

Stefan, Sabine, Lars & Koen





Dear Margarita:

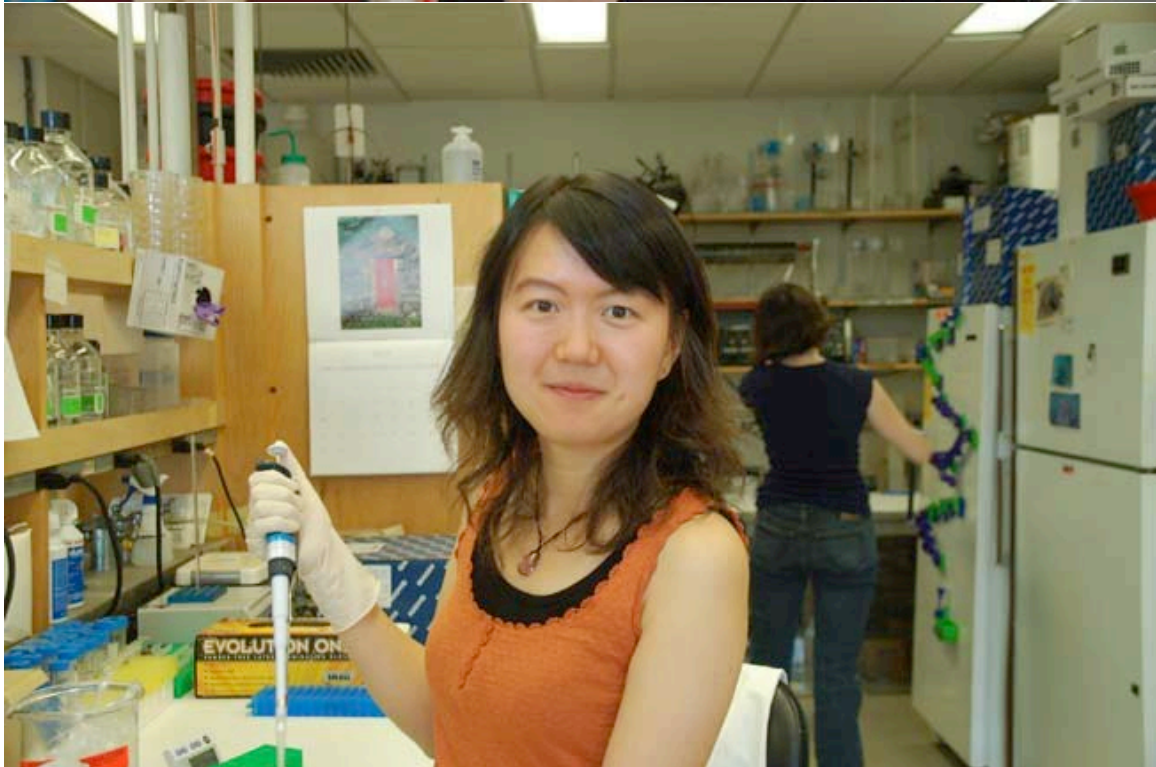
When I think about the many times that I went to your office just to see you and chat and the amount of love and support you have offered me throughout the years, I can honestly say that for me you were the best part of being in the Sharp Lab. Being in a wonderfully creative, stimulating environment, surrounded by incredibly talented and smart people and learning how to become a scientist from the greatest scientist I have met, Phil, is definitely the experience of a lifetime. But we all know how hard graduate school is, how incredibly grueling and at times discouraging science can be. Without your quite, patient and warm support the experience of graduate school would have been unbearable for me. You always welcomed us with a wonderful smile, no matter how much work you had, and ALWAYS made time for us. It is no wonder how we all gravitated towards you like moths to the light. Your office was always opened and when I went to see you, there was usually someone else there already. As I have started my own career, mentoring others and working in large groups, I often remember the example you set of us of how to treat those around you: with patience and kindness.

Thank YOU Margarita from the bottom of my heart. You have touched all of our lives more than you can possibly know. I am very spoiled and lucky that I still get to see you often. Even now, several years after leaving the lab, I can come by and know you will be there – always with a smile, cheering me on in all of my professional and personal endeavors.

Lots of hugs and many more kisses to you.

Warmly,

Lourdes Alemán (Sharp Lab Graduate Student, 2004-2008)





Dear Margarita,

As we celebrate Phil's birthday and the many achievements of our fellow Sharpies, I hope you are happy to know that you have played an integral role in the success of each and every student and postdoc who has walked through the lab. If there were a Lab Administrator "hall of fame", Margarita, you would be the first inductee. I have recently learned that no laboratory runs as smooth as the Sharp Lab—you really are that GREAT at what you do!! On a personal level, I always appreciated that no matter what Phil had you doing at the moment, you always took time to talk regarding anything that was bothering me at the time. All these acts of kindness showed me that you really cared about each and every one of us—I know that you treated everyone else as well too. Thank you for always being a light in the Sharp Lab! It has made the difference in my time in the lab and I will always take with me all that you have taught me. Thank you for being you! Amalia and I were so thrilled that you could join us for our East coast reception. Here is a picture of Amalia and I at the beach 1 hour before our wedding ceremony in Newport Beach, CA. Amalia and I wish you the best and we will stay in touch! Go Sharp Lab.

With love,

Albert and Amalia Almada

Dear Margarita,

So many things are uncertain during grad school, but it has been so wonderful to always be able to count on you for a smile, a kind word, and some well-placed wit right when I need it. Even when I drop in unannounced for some random and usually tedious favor, you never fail to greet me with, Hi there, have a seat! It is no secret to all of us that you're the one that holds the lab together, but we don't say it often enough... So thank you Margarita for everything you do, and for making the Sharp lab feel like family!

Love,
Mohini

June 2014





Margarita,
Thanks for all you have done, are doing, and will do for the Sharp lab and really for the advancement of scientific research in general. The lab (and Phil) couldn't function without you. :)

I am always amazed at your willingness to chat at any time when we stop by your office, despite the many things demanding your attention. Also, when (if) you decide to retire, you should seriously consider a career in modeling. →

Love,
Andrew Bosson





Dear Margarita,

I still remember my first day in the lab, you told me that the time here would pass in the blink of an eye, and it has. It's hard to believe that wasn't only a few months ago. But the time hasn't gone so fast as to prevent me from forming some wonderful memories of my time here, and many of those include you. Beyond everything you have done for me and the lab in your role as the world's greatest administrator (you were helping me put together postdoctoral fellowship applications before I had even met you!), you have also been a good friend to Abby and me. We both always look forward to the precious few moments that we have had to stop, sit a while, and simply enjoy each other's company. So while life in a science lab goes speeding past in a blur, those are the memories that will stay with me, and bring a smile to my face. Thank you for everything, because none of us could have done anything without you.

Love,

Paul & Abby

Dear Margarita,

As you know, my time with the lab started with a bang. Unfortunately, the bang was my face hitting the Longfellow Bridge when I tripped on my way to the interview. I remember looking in car windows and thinking- maybe they won't even notice, maybe this is a bad sign about moving to Boston. As I stood in the CCR elevator and felt everyone staring at my face, my stress levels skyrocketed. This lasted until I walked in your office and your caring response calmed me. I remember you blaming the construction workers for always leaving a mess. You were so convincing that when I tell this story to others I refer to the LongFellow Bridge "construction zone", but it was more like a random piece of rebar that got me. This is just one example of you always genuinely and casually providing the right amount of support and comfort to keep us going. For this, above all the other countless things you do to ensure our success, thank you! You're the best, jesse

A.



B.



Figure 1. Data showing Boston eventually grew on me. A. The only photo evidence I secretly rooted for the Red Sox. Fenway 2012 (left), Erin and I at Red Sox Spring training 2013 (right). (I leave these in trusted hands.). B. Part of Dodgers loving family that would never stop teasing me if they ever saw the photos in panel A.

Dear Margarita,

It was always such a pleasure to come to lab, see you, and chat with you! And when I come to visit from the other side of the river I am always excited to catch up with you.

You're the soul of the lab and have been here longer than anyone (except for Phil ☺). Look, I found your name in a Nobel Prize winning paper!

The role of the spliced RNA segment at the 5' end of adenovirus late mRNA is subject to speculation. This RNA segment could be involved in the selection of certain viral RNA sequences for transport to the cell cytoplasm or could be responsible for the preferential translation of viral mRNA during the late stage of infection. Because the capped 5' terminus of eukaryotic mRNA is thought to be directly involved in the initiation of translation of mRNA, an involvement of these sequences in the control of translation would be expected.

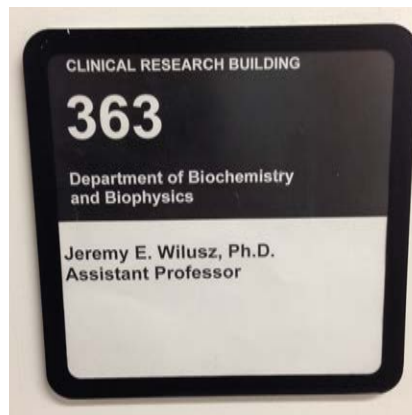
We would like to thank Arnold J. Berk, Timothy J. Harrison, Daniel Donoghue, and David Baltimore for comments on the manuscript, and **Ms. Margarita Siaraca** for typing the manuscript. We gratefully acknowledge the suggestion by David Baltimore that we map the RNA sequences in the 5' tail by electron microscopy of RNA-DNA hybrids. This work was supported by an American Cancer Society Grant and

Except for helping with this splicing paper, you contributed so much to science. Just look at the number of graduate students, postdocs and undergrads you helped to... Basically all the people in the symposium! You are always so nice and helpful. Maybe that's why when Victoria and I were designing SharpPark, we made your character with flowers and chocolates (I put Phil here too for fun).

In any case, Margarita, you are awesome! I hope to continue seeing you in the Koch, otherwise I might visit less often ☺...

-Evgeny





For the Chief..

I'll always cherish all of our talks and your generosity (including the many pieces of candy). You embody the Sharp lab – hardworking, classy, and striving for the best. I can not thank you enough. All the best, Jeremy



Margarita,

Thank you for taking
care of the lab! You
have witnessed the
growing of the Wu's
family as well!

Xuebing Wu
2010-2014



8/11/2010
Qifang & Xuebing



12/9/2014
Xuebing, Qifang, Charles
Charles born on 1/5/2012



5/28/2014

Xuebing, Charles, Tim, Qifang. Tim was born on 1/28/2014

My dearest Margarita-

Roses are red
Violets are blue
You are awesome
I can't think of anything that rhymes with awesome...

Ok let's try again:

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Thanks for being a ray of sunshine
And everything that you do

POW!

Thanks for being a "fixer" for all things lab related. It's great to know that when the science is going poorly you are there and consistently in a great mood. Even when I know you aren't having the best day you put on a smiling face and you can consistently brighten my day. I don't think you ever get the proper recognition for what you do for the lab. I'm not sure that anything we put together can truly thank you appropriately but let me say: THANK YOU. The lab wouldn't be the same without you and I hope you realize the difference you have made in undergraduates, graduate students and postdocs lives as they progress through the Sharp Lab.
Tim Kelly



Margarita,



moments like this make us so grateful for the AMAZING gift that you are! Thank you!
- Courtney & Anthony



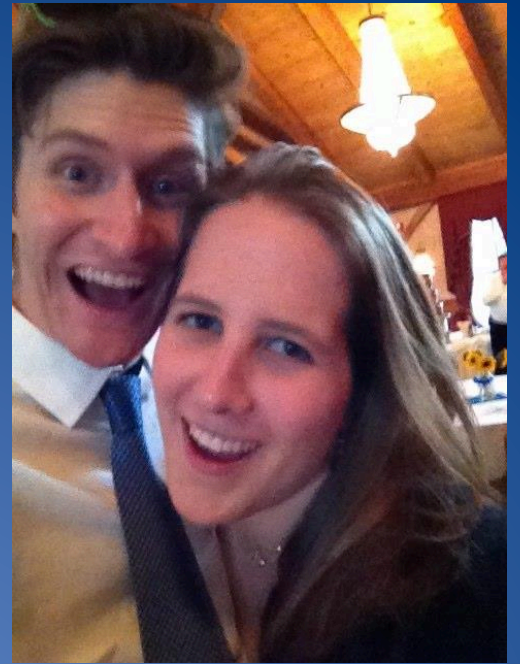
Dear Margarita,

The Sharpies are really like a family to me, and you are the glue that hold us together as "Lab Mom." I am not sure what we would all do without you. You keep us organized, taken care of, and smiling. I enjoy our chats over coffee and appreciate your wisdom and perspective. You are the first person I talk to when I'm feeling a little down and you always put a smile back on my face!

Thank you for being a dedicated and wonderful "Lab Mom." We couldn't do it without you!



*With love,
Sara*



Sharpies ♥ Margarita



Summer Picnic – August 2012

Dearest Margarita,

You are truly the center of our Sharpie family, and we appreciate all that you do for us. Thank you so much for loving all of us like family and always being there to support us through all the ups and downs of life both inside and outside of lab.

It has been a pleasure to work with you, and I really enjoyed being on your team, from trying to figure out how to spell Xuebing's wife's name (Qifang I think?) at the summer picnic to organizing the logistics for various lectures and speaker visits at MIT! You keep the lab together and running smoothly, but more importantly, you are a wonderful friend to us all.

Some of my most treasured memories from working in the lab are just our "brief" conversations. You always greet me with a warm smile and never hesitate to help with anything I might need, in lab or in life.





Wedding Brunch for Allan and Jenny – March 2013

I'll never forget the wonderful words of wisdom you imparted on me during my time at MIT, and all the times you were there to congratulate me on my successes and to guide me when I felt lost. When I was new in the lab, you made me feel welcome. When no one else took photos, and you noticed my camera and encouraged me to be creative. When I was unsure of what the future would throw at me, you helped me gain confidence and the courage to just go for what I wanted. What strikes me most is that you are always level-headed and teeming full of common sense (which I have learned is not really common at all). From dentists to feta cheese and even humanity, you've imparted so much knowledge and good advice to me.

You are the most caring and thoughtful person I know, and I hope that we will keep in touch more so that I can try to return some of the love you have given to me. Also, if you visit me, I promise to take you to the most beautiful beaches and take you to eat delicious food! Thanks again, Margarita, for being a wonderful coworker, friend, and family member.

Sincerely,
Victoria Lu



Christmas Party – 2012 2



For Margarita!

Dear Margarita,

You are the best! I will never forget the day when I came to Phil's office as a freshman, hoping for a UROP, and I was so kindly welcomed and encouraged by you! Since that fateful day, it has been such a pleasure to get to know you, be in your presence, and to always enjoy a wonderful conversation whenever I dropped by your office. I really appreciate your kind and generous heart, and how you are always smiling. Plus, you are the hero behind the scenes, supporting Phil, his crazy schedule, and the lab- but somehow, you make it all happen with a smile! Margarita, you deserve all the praise and credit for who you are and what you do so awesomely each and every day. We are all so blessed to have you, and I will really miss you, now that I am working in a different lab =(Nonetheless, I always want to see when I visit lab, and talking to you always is one of the highlights of my day! Take care Margarita, and keep being the awesome lady you are!

With love,

Prakriti =)

Dear Margarita,

Thank you for being an extraordinary woman with an extraordinarily big heart. I am so lucky and honored to call you a friend, and I cannot imagine my MIT experience without you in it. Thank you for everything!

Sincerely,
Laura Lu



Once a Sharpie, Always a Sharpie



Dear Margarita,

Thank you so much for always being there for us. I remember as a freshman I was pretty much clueless about what paperwork I would have to do to work in this lab, and you were so friendly and so patient helping me figure it out! And in the years since then you've helped me with many applications and nominations. You're in your office every day and you always have a smile for anyone who comes by. It means so much to me to have that support. I know I speak for everyone when I say we couldn't have done all the things we've done without you.

Andrea



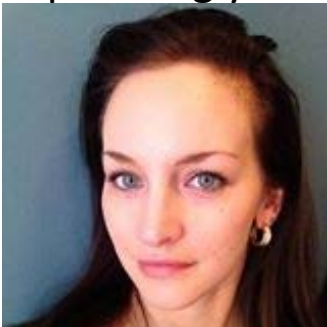


*Dear Margarita,
Thank you so much for all your help so far
and we look forward to many years
together ahead!*

*The Gargs
(Safil, Agya, and Vani)*

Dear Margarita,

Thank you for all your help, advice and support with getting settled in the Sharp lab!! You have been a great help in finding my way around and taking care of all kinds of issues that I have needed help with, whether it be advice on where to find a certain building in MIT without getting lost, where can I find yellow markers, when am I allowed to email Phil (and should I write Dear Dr on it) or getting a house loan. The lab would surely not be functional without you 😊 . Thank you for everything and I look forward to the upcoming years in the lab with you.



CHEERS! Katja H

Dear Margarita,

I can't thank you enough for your continued support.

Best wishes, Hiroshi

(This is a picture in the previous hospital. He is not
my child.)





**LAB IS LIKE A BOX OF CHOCOLATES...
YOU NEVER KNOW WHO YOU'RE
GONNA GET!**

**THANKS FOR PUTTING UP WITH OUR ANTICS
AND FOR MAKING EVERY DAY SO MUCH SWEETER!**



**LOVE,
THE SHARPIE GRAD STUDENTS, 2013**

















from the Sharpies