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IN MEMORIAM

Professor José M. Fernandez Vozmediano (1951-2011)☆

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On March 22 last, my teacher and friend, Professor José M. Fernández Vozmediano, left us. I can assure the few of you who did not know him personally that he left nobody indifferent, and that meeting José—or Pepe as he was called by his friends—was an event that marked one for life. To those who knew him, I have nothing to say, because the silence of his absence is as loud as the tumult he created when he was still among us.

Born to Ines Vozmediano and Dr. Fernández Con-tioso, from his father Pepe inherited a fascination for dermatology—which gradually became the focus of his career, interests, and aspirations—and also the cheerfulness and natural charm that made him so endearing. From his mother he inherited the iron willed, stubborn nature of

the Vozmediano line from Bilbao, infused with the blood of soldiers who travelled as far afield as the Philippines. Unconditionally loyal and unflinching in his sincerity, he lived life to the full and to the brink within the self-imposed boundaries of a timeless sense of honor. And, like his father, Pepe always aspired to being the best of friends to his friends.

Trained at the Hospital de Mora de Cádiz in southern Spain, Pepe was appointed professor of dermatology at the University of Cadiz in 1989 and head of dermatology at the Hospital Universitario de Puerto Real from 1991. As a boss, he was tough, demanding, and disciplined: no easy boss, but certainly a good one. He took charge of the dermatology department in this small hospital, where his great—and undervalued—achievement was to make it known in all corners of the world. This he did through perseverance, tenacity and hard work—but especially hard work, for which he had an inexhaustible capacity. He was inordinately proud of having put his hospital on the map, which he did through his professional activities. I often ran into him at international conferences—speaking his inimitable English—where he garnered the respect of prestigious European and US dermatologists who were captivated by his incisive vision of dermatology, one he had acquired from his own teachers, especially Professor Cabré and Professor Ocaña, but also from Professor Dulanto, whose surgery school he was enormously proud to follow. Pepe expressed great admiration for Professor Camacho in particular, as he considered him to be an exemplary professional.

His international prestige was no accident, based as it was on his ongoing commitment to patient care. What was really admirable in Pepe was his proximity to the patient, his interest in disease, and his lifelong dedication to improving his knowledge and skills. His boundless curiosity kept him abreast of the latest innovations. He pioneered cryosurgery, laser therapy, and photodynamic therapy in Spain as well as the use of the novel biologic agents to manage psoriasis. As a leader and man of science he endeavored to participate in as many working groups as possible. He was vice-president of the Andalusian section of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (AEDV), second national delegate to the Ibero-Latin American College of Dermatology (CILAD),

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president of the Iberoamerican Cryosurgery College (CIAC), coordinator of the Spanish Pediatric Dermatology Group (GEDP), head of the Spanish Trichology Group (GET), and coordinator of the Spanish Dermatological Surgery, Laser and Cutaneous Oncology Group (GECIDOC); he was also expected to be the next coordinator of the Spanish Contact Dermatitis and Skin Allergy Research Group (GEIDAC). And not content with all those responsibilities, with the ultimate goal of helping his patients, Pepe nurtured an enduring interest in learning about the latest dermatological developments.

As head of a hospital dermatology department, Pepe always battled to defend the interests of his peers against the institution, the unions, or whatever other windmill that threatened to overwhelm his world. And if he was Don Quijote, then I was his Sancho Panza. Idealistic in defending rights, Pepe never understood half measures, compromises, or unnecessary risks. He was always honest, direct, and relentless in encounters. Defender of what he considered to be just causes and, above all, upright, with strongly entrenched and honest principles and a forceful and passionate personality, he did not play diplomatic games if he was convinced of the rightness of what he was defending.

But above all he was a master teacher. He taught at the University of Cadiz, which he loved, revered and staunchly defended. A universal teacher, his many dozens of disciples are to be found on both sides of the Atlantic and scattered across the map as far as the South Pole. Generous and unselfish with his knowledge and wisdom, he shared even the smallest of his secrets with anyone who asked. Benevolent, patient, warm and cordial as he was, it is truly moving for those of us who loved him to receive so many tokens of affection from so many parts of the world. Pepe Vozmediano was venerated in Latin America and felt particularly attached to its countries. I am of the opinion that this was probably due to the fact that this displaced native of Huelva lived many years of his life in a city as evocative of Havana and its quays as Cádiz, land of the *habaneras* (songs of departure and return), and felt irresistibly drawn—as a discoverer rather than a privateer—to the Antilles.

This great teacher was responsible for deflecting me from taking up a career in internal medicine and encouraging me to become the dermatologist I am today. It is only fair to acknowledge that he was responsible for everything I know today, for my love for this profession and, for better or for worse, for my public speaking skills. Because he was of the opinion that the ability to speak in public was indispensable in both teaching and medicine. Hence, all his residents acquired, to some degree, the ability to speak in public—although on more than one occasion Pepe was sorely disappointed with the effort!

Pepe was the grand master of science and of life. From him, right up to the end, we learned to forge unyieldingly ahead to confront diseases that others might have considered incurable.

But above all, I've lost a friend. There was a side to Pepe that few knew, because he was not a demonstrative person. You had to make an effort to know him, and then he revealed that, under the stern facade, he was affable and gentle, almost fragile, I would say. He was a friend to his friends, among them: José Carlos, Salvio, Julian, Eduardo,

Hugo, Jerónimo, Pepe, Miguel Ángel, Juan Luis, José Antonio, Antonio, Mercedes, Keka, Juana, Amalia, Carmen, Agustín, Luis, Ana, Elena, Esther, Christina, Guadalupe, Manolo, Carlos, Paco, Valentín, Jorge, Horacio, Gilberto.... Only we knew his other side: the naughty child, the tireless collector of comic books, old books, press clippings, skin disease photos, stamps—he used to say he was philatelic not syphilitic—and lead figures. A joker, a bullfighting *aficionado* and a fan of flamenco, he enjoyed encounters, discussion and debate with friends: conversation, wine and cigars. Time no longer existed; fatigue and worries were put to one side. It was then that his blue eyes lost the burning brightness of battle and softened in color. He cried easily, loved deeply but quietly, and laughed from the soul.

He worshipped his children, José and Inés, and admired and was proud of them, with good reason. They were the chink in his armor, and he was aware that they would be his bulwark to the end. He loved and revered his wife, Charo, on whom he depended to an unimaginable degree. The beacon of his nights and the light of his days, she was the anchor for his life and for the enormous weight of his vocation and responsibilities. He was a man who was truly loved and cherished, admired by friends, and respected by all.

A *copla* from Cádiz goes:

Death is a beach with a face of naked grief

Dancing and glowing beneath the sky

Death is a rain that falls upwards

With long hair and a brown back

We've been waiting for him our whole life long

Death is the best farewell

No matter your gender, age or homeland

As long as you live, he's hiding and waiting

He spends a hundred thousand Christmases with us

Death lives down the street

Just next to the bar

He's no stranger to red blood, bones, or pain.

Death buys picnic wine and roses in the supermarket

Naked I greet him always with respect

Death one day slipped into my bed

And with his brown back and face of grief

He laid his hand on my healthy other half

And I said yes

(Juan Carlos Aragón Becerra)

May Pepe rest in peace.

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