My dear Fernando

To the Editor: Fernando Valderrábano passed away just two months before the “1st International Conference on New Insights in End-Stage Renal Disease” in Madrid, of which he had been the enthusiastic inspiration and promoter right up until his final days. For these reasons, the organizing scientific committee has unanimously dedicated this special issue to his memory.

Probably the most well-known and well-loved Spanish nephrologist has left us, in an atmosphere of comprehension and serenity, resisting to the end and secure in the love of his wife Mabel, his children, family, friends, colleagues and disciples. Maybe with his last breaths came thoughts similar to those expressed in the last poem of our Nobel prize winner, Camilo José Cela: “I know well that I am dying, not through old age, but through love.”

Fernando’s life was brief but intensely lived. He was a shining example of the perfect blend of life and work; his way of life wasn’t merely a reflection of his passion for medicine, but the love of medicine itself. Or maybe the opposite. It was difficult, or even impossible, to separate the physician from the man. Behind the picaresque gesture, the bear-like body, the sometimes resonant and sometimes sweet voice, was hidden the loyal friend, the good, generous man, the charming gentleman. He was polite and sincere, tough and fragile, incisive yet naïve... all this and much more was Fernando. I had the privilege to be close to him for many years, to be his “younger brother” as he used to call me.

Fernando was much more than his vast professional biography that others have praised. He was a mixture of rare and exemplary qualities ranging from sincerity to gallantry. He would never ask more of anyone than he himself was prepared to give—generosity was his hallmark. He could be as commanding as a Royal Navy Admiral, as love-struck as a teenager, hard in the face of the intractable, respectful in the presence of talent, brave in the midst of adversity, humble in moments of triumph, a staunch friend and redoubtable opponent. He was as indomitable as a Castillian of old, a man of great flare, a tireless worker and indefatigable traveller.

Fernando put his all into everything that he did, and as a result did it all very well, every day and every minute of his life: from clinical practice to research, to fine wines, to writing and reading, in his painting and love of music. Like Gracían, he thought that there can be no desert more arid than a life without friends, and he showed all of us who were his friends that the desert was not his natural habitat. All of these elements came together to make Fernando a singular personality.

I read somewhere that “we die a little with the death of each soul mate.” Fernando’s death ripped a very big piece of my heart out, leaving me almost lifeless.

Jose Miguel Cruz

Fernando Valderrábano Quintana was born in Madrid on December 29, 1941 and passed away in a ward of his Nephrology Service, at Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid on September 6, 2001.