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Special Article

Tribute to Evandro de Oliveira

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Lou Gehrig played major league baseball with the New York Yankees for 17 years and his streak of 2,130 consecutive games stood as monument in baseball history to strength and dedication to the game despite injury and adversity, earning him the nickname "The Iron Horse." He was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and retired from the game after noticing loss of strength, slipping and falling, and dyscoordination. It seems that Evandro's passing was from the same or a similar progressive neurodegenerative disease, which is not only undeserved but also tragically cruel for a man so gifted with motor control, dexterity, and grace. Who among us wasn't mesmerized by his operative dissections that seemed almost cadaver-like in their cleanliness and perfection? It is difficult to lose Evandro under any circumstances and feels wrong to lose him in this way.

A decade ago, Evandro invited me to teach a course with him in Valencia, Spain. We spent an entire week together lecturing on aneurysm surgery and performing cadaver dissections in the lab. We had not worked together previously. I was never his trainee and had gotten to know him only through meetings and shared interests, particularly on the topic of AVMs. He seemed to take a liking to me as someone who also loved mincroneurosurgery and would take up the crusade to preserve it in the face of endovascular attack and relentless market forces. The week in Valencia became my unofficial fellowship with Evandro. He taught me the transcavernous approach, which I never learned as a resident; he sold me on supracerebellar-transtentorial approaches to temporal lobe lesions in the sitting position; he shared his ideas on paraclinoidal aneurysms and his vast experience with brain AVMs. He lectured for hours every day in a language that I could not understand, but I absorbed it through his slides, videos, gesticulations, and the occasional words in English.

The last time I saw Evandro was at the de Oliviera Symposium in April 2019 in San Diego. Unable to finish dressing himself and not wanting to miss any talks, he wandered into the lobby of the hotel en route to the conference room holding his untied tie in his hand. I pulled him aside and tied it for him. My first thought was that this disease had our beloved Evandro squarely in its merciless grip and there would be no escape. My second thought, as I entered the conference room with Evandro and saw countless faces light up at the sight of him, was that this man was deeply loved by his peers. Evandro had a hard time speaking at the time of his Symposium and could not articulate the depth of his emotions, but I was reminded of what Lou Gehrig said in his now famous speech at Yankee Stadium on the day he retired: "I am the luckiest man alive." Evandro must have felt lucky to have vanquished so many aneurysms and AVMs, to have earned the admiration and respect of his peers, and to have become the godfather of Brazilian neurosurgery. Like Gehrig, Evandro was the iron horse of his domain and soldiered on tirelessly with strength and dedication to make his mark on neurosurgery. Thank you Evandro for the mark you made on me, and may you rest in peace while we continue the crusade.

Conflict of Interest
None.

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