



## Evandro de Oliveira, the “Brain Whisperer”

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The sun is more than 90 million miles from earth. In the far distant future, a day will come when its nuclear engine will be exhausted and sunlight will finally cease to exist. Our star will die, yet the last agonal rays that it will ever emit will still cross the solar system at the speed of light. For an entire period of 8 minutes, we humans, if our race is still in existence, will be witnessing the last burst of energy of a departed star. Yet in those 8 minutes, basking in the last daylight we will ever see, we will undoubtedly want to celebrate its last glow, even if it heralds our own extinction. Perhaps some will, understandably, live their last moments in utter panic. I would like to believe that many more will be inspired to remain serene, reflective, intensely appreciative of those precious last packets of warmth heating their smiling faces and stirring their hearts. At the very least, they will be moved to the realization that these rays are now just the memory of a departed sun; a memory that, strangely, feels more intense and real than ever before. These men and women would have then understood that the messenger may have died, but the message was still alive.

On February 11, 2021, a major neurosurgical star has joined another world. Evandro de Oliveira, MD, PhD, knew

his end was nearing. ALS, that most cruel of diseases, had taken its toll on his body but not his mind; how supremely unjust that one of the most graceful of micro-neurosurgeons be struck with immobility. He departed surrounded by his most loving family. There was Marina his wife of 47 years, and their two daughters, Romina the physician and Sabrina the gastronome. They had showered him with love and attention throughout his illness. So did the entire neurosurgical community. A very special Symposium in his honor took place at the AANS Meeting in April 2019, and was marked by a celebration of his legacy through the participation of peers and disciples. More awards and honors kept coming. The last recognition from his peers was just 5 days prior to his death, when the World Academy of Neurological Surgeons (WANS) bestowed on him a Lifetime Achievement Award in a most moving virtual ceremony.

Evandro, born on November 8, 1945, grew up in beautiful Florianópolis in Brazil. He obtained his Medical Degree from the Federal University of Santa Catarina in 1969, then onto Neurosurgical Residency at the Institute of Neurology and Neurosurgery at the Universidad de la Republica in Montevideo, Uruguay. Always driven to excel, he spent time with the greats: Yasargil, Drake, Malis, Wilson, Sundt and absorbed all the wisdom he could that shaped him into the supreme master that he became. His passion for neuroanatomy naturally drove him to a Fellowship with Al Rhoton in 1981/1982. His subsequent career included appointments at the Hospital Beneficencia Portuguesa, the University of Sao Paulo, the State University of Campinas – UNICAMP. In more recent years, he had become Adjunct Professor of Neurosurgery at Mayo Clinic/Jacksonville in Florida. His anatomical laboratory in Sao Paulo has witnessed 355 courses and more than 7000 participants. He has trained 91 Fellows and has received 570 visitors. The quality and quantity of his academic productivity are phenomenal and will undoubtedly be celebrated in print by his admiring disciples.

The man is indistinguishable from the surgeon. Some of the drivers of his being are very easy to discern: unflinching passion, unshakable determination, undeviating convictions, uncommon surgical skills, unfaltering work ethic,

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uncompromising love of surgical esthetics, unwavering devotion to surgical education, unapologetic spirituality. The artistry in design is weaved within the surgical execution. The surgical photograph is hard to distinguish from a meticulous cadaveric dissection. His 3D spatial orientation is remarkably refined. It is hard to decide which is more impressive, his tenacity in pursuing a surgical goal, his focus in achieving that goal, the artistry of the moves, the skill of the execution, or the sublime beauty of the final result. His disciples loved to compare him to Michelangelo. I preferred to call him a “brain whisperer”, for he seemed to have that intangible extra-sensory connection to brains.

It is not common for neurosurgeons to shed tears with the passing of one of their own, especially in the eighth decade of life. We tend to be stoic, reserved, and composed. But many tears are being shed for Evandro, from all corners of the world. There is certainly an intense element of loss, loss of a teacher, a friend, a brother-in-arms, a man of uncommon and endearing sincerity. But it’s more than that; it’s something more visceral. It’s because Evandro was a beacon of clarity in a field marred with murkiness. It’s because we lost a champion of confidence, of conviction, of contentment, and of openness. It’s because with his loss disappears yet one more unusual human being who says what he means, who means

what he says, who walks the walk better than he talks the talk. It’s because he is quite simply irreplaceable.

Evandro the messenger is gone, but unlike our sun, his legacy will last more than 8 minutes, a lot more in fact. It will outlast all the obituaries, eulogies, and retold stories. The message has already taken a life of its own. It is already thriving in the hands of those he taught. As long as humans will continue to be mesmerized by that most complex collection of matter in the universe, we call brain, and continue to operate on it, the Evandro afterglow will persist through space and time in the hearts and minds of many generations of surgeons to come. And to those who are unaware of the message, I respectfully quote the last paragraph of the poem “Evandro, the Brain Whisperer”:

*His voice had long been spent, many sermons over  
And for those who missed his School or chose to ignore  
Today is your chance to believe and start over  
Make his whisper your own and shout it like a roar*

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