In memoriam
José A. Zadunaisky (1932–2005)

We regret to report the sad passing of José Zadunaisky, a founder, Council member, Secretary (1976–1980) and President (1980–1984) of the International Society of Eye Research (ISER), and an Executive Editor of Experimental Eye Research for 20 years.

To those of us fortunate enough to come under his spell, José was larger than life, in frame, spirit, intellect, curiosity and warmth. He reminds us of another child of Argentina, the musician Daniel Barenboim, who once remarked that there was no barrier between the popular tangos and the classical music of his youth in Buenos Aires. Similarly, there were no barriers or limitations to José’s passionate curiosity, which spanned science and medicine, comparative physiology, languages, and good food and wine. José was fluent in five languages and quite adequate in a variety of others. His enthusiasms for gastronomy and oenology were expressed in newspaper columns communicated under the nom de plume, Dr Zeta.

José earned his baccalaureate and medical degrees at the University of Buenos Aires, completing his Doctor of Medicine Thesis at the University’s Institute of Physiology, then directed by the Nobel laureate Bernardo A. Houssay. After a year of postgraduate training at each of two international physiological meccas of the time, the laboratories of E.J. Conway in Dublin and Hans H. Ussing in Copenhagen, his career took him back to Buenos Aires. He found that in his absence, great ferment for science had built up under the influence of Houssay. That marked the beginning of José’s remarkable mentorship of so many; his first crop of Fellows included Mario Parisi, Virgilio Lew, Oscar Candia, Ricardo Montoreano, Dante Chiarandini, Marta Piras, and Jorge Fischbarg. He later moved to the University of Louisville, then Yale, and New York University. Colleagues with whom he interacted continued to develop fine careers in science: to name a few, Mauricio Lande, Karl Karnaky, Stephen Klyce, Bruce Cherkersey.

For many years (1975–1999) José did Summer research as Principal Investigator at the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory, Salisbury Cove, Maine. This interest of his in comparative Physiology led to what was going to be his final appointment at the Rosenstiel School of Marine Sciences of the University of Miami, from which he retired on 11/30/03 less than two years before his death.

Characteristically, José left his scientific mark in several fields, including general transport physiology, the physiology of the cornea and ciliary epithelium, and transport physiology of marine species. One unifying thread in much of his work was his focus on transepithelial chloride transport. His results helped document that the distribution of chloride was not simply passive, as initially viewed by Ussing, but was transported actively by many epithelia. Early reports of that work were published in Nature and the Journal of General Physiology.

José received many honors, including the Alcon Award in 1984 and the Endre Balazs Award of the International Society of Eye Research for Distinguished Contributions to Eye Research in 1992. Additional honors and other aspects of his distinguished career are noted elsewhere.¹

Beyond the scholarly legacy and honors, José was a ‘people person’, attracting young investigators to his laboratory and actively encouraging both younger and older colleagues to follow new initiatives he deemed promising. He organized and energized colleagues as founder of the Transport Club of New York and its director for 14 years. He also served the scientific community as member of the NIH Visual Science (1976–1980) and Behavioral Science (1984–1988) Study Sections and Director of Training Grants of the National Eye Institute at New York University Medical Center for 15 years. In addition to his service with ISER and this journal, he was a member of organizing committees and Chairman of the Physiology and Pharmacology Section (1969–1972 and 1993–1996) of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO).

José Zadunaisky had a genuine interest in the promotion of eye research throughout the world, particularly in countries with a scarce tradition in this type of research. That attitude was possibly the consequence of his own vital experience as a young scientist forced to leave his native country in order to develop a scientific career. José had a deep sympathy for young scientists that struggled to do research in less favoured countries and made all the efforts to help and motivate them. He was able to fascinate students with endless descriptions of personal anecdotes, and his encyclopedic knowledge of

different cultures. The accessibility of José to young scientists during his years as Secretary and President of ISER, his readiness to help them and his enthusiasm to promote eye research helped many students to decide their scientific career in eye research.

He did not forget his roots, serving as member of the board of reviewers for the Argentine FONCYT and as member of committees for professorial appointments to his alma mater.

Illness incapacitated José’s frame, but not his spirit, during his last few years. It was difficult for him to accept separation from his beloved laboratory activity when he finally retired just a year after a Festschrift celebrated his career at the Rosenstiel School, and he retained social contact with colleagues. Born July 15, 1932 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, José died 73 years later on August 20, 2005 at his Miami home. A great man, erudite and jovial, and an outstanding physiologist, he knew how to enjoy life and wanted it to be known that he was not afraid of death. He could be the most charming, warm and interesting person in the world. This is why he had throughout all his life women who loved him and friends who will always miss his company.

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Available online 19 December 2005