IN MEMORIAM

Norbert Vasile — A prominent personality in our discipline

We do not do a eulogy for a colleague like we speak of a friend who has passed on. For all those who knew him well in his generation, Norbert Vasile was both, with, depending on the people, more of a friend relationship or more of a colleague relationship. It is difficult to control our emotion when we were both colleague and friend!

Indeed, he blended into our community and reinforced it by pitching in whole-heartedly to hospital and university group activities with a commitment that was as transparent as it was deep and sincere. Proof of this would be the number of mandates that he had in the Council of Radiology Teachers of France from 1980 to 1984 and 1990 to 1991. This period demonstrates his perseverance in his activities and the renewed acclaim that we gave him fully. We never caught him granting himself the least personal benefit from his group activities. His functions as Secretary of the editors of the Journal of Radiology in 1989 and 1993 and as Treasurer at the French Radiology Society from 1996 to 2006 are further proof of this. Is there a more discreet role, more effaced and at the same time more decisive than handling the finances of our great learned society?

As we knew him well, we are sure that Norbert would have been embarrassed to hear us recite his many functions and responsibilities that conferred on him so many titles to which he attached little importance. Because he was a man with a heart, with reason and from the field, and smiled in a detached way at the importance that some people gave to these honours.

We often discussed his department at the Hospital Henri-Mondor, the patients of which he served from 1984 to 2003 after his boss Ferrané, with his students Didier Mathieu and Alain Rahmouni, and younger colleagues that he knew when they were interns, Hicham Kobeiter, Alain Luciani and Jean-François Deux. We often spoke of his meetings with such and such a person, medical or non-medical, of his team, regardless of the place they held in the hierarchy, and he always showed understanding, indulgence and support. It is rare to hear a department head speak of his personnel with so much attachment, federating concern and respect. His judgment was always fair and influenced by the generosity he had with regard to the person in question, but he knew how to firmly shorten any discussion that he deemed sterile. It is not by chance either if, starting from the beginning of his time as department head, the Hospital Henri-Mondor became the showcase of imaging in cuts, and if he used his experience, which many people envied him at the time, to publish many precursor books.

Norbert would certainly have liked it if we did not say all that about him. Because he eluded everything that could honour or glorify him and was only passionate about the public object. We first started by working with him, a reserved, discreet, sometimes difficult to know man. Then, trust set in as we discovered common affinities, objectives and ways to reach them. Then, slowly and without realizing it, we began to have a strange sensation that the man we had in front of us was worth much more than wanted to show, and we started to feel esteem and friendship for him. Because we agreed with everything he said, because he respected everything we suggested, because one step more towards a little less reserve revealed to us a sensitive man. And we thus moved from the desire to work with him to the desire to see him again to allow a deep esteem to mature and to show our sympathy. It is by modesty and elegance that this man remained discreet, but a few evenings with his wife, far from his profession, where he spoke of his children, of his travels, of his hobbies, were enough to vanquish his outward hermitism.

Norbert had skin of Italian origin that tanned very quickly in the sun of conferences, as quickly as the opinion one could have of him could change by knowing him better. The book of his life just closed on the last page of a long disease. Beyond the merits that his generation unanimously recognized in him, he will remain this discreet man, detached but sensitive, this voice with an indefinable tone that was sometimes reminiscent of that of a blues singer, this man with such a big heart, this university professor who was so prolific, this man who was attentive to all his friends and family, this friend who came to you without you expecting him, with whom we would have liked to reinforce so much complicity.

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We should not be surprised by his withdrawal from all professional activity at the time of his retirement. Very respectful of the younger generation, he did not want to impose. Many among us still consulted him informally and always received a warm welcome and precise answers that we did not always expect.

That was Norbert Vasile. For all of us, he will remain present because the memory of a man that we esteemed so much cannot be erased.