The tribute, “He was a gentleman and a scholar,” just touches the tip of the iceberg for Fernando Duran, MSN, RN, FAAN. I met Fernando in 1978, when the American Academy of Nursing (AAN) was being formed. He and I were among the 39 charter members.

Phyllis Verhonick, Fernando, and I wrote the original by-laws—to which the American Nurses Association (ANA) objected. It took us (and the AAN) years to gain a professional relationship with the ANA. We also planned the first yearly programs and wrote the rules for how individuals could become members of the AAN. Fernando was persuasive, diligent, and creative throughout this period. When the rest of us became discouraged with the political process, he always found a way to reframe what was going on and

Fernando Duran and his wife, Therese, on July 4, 2016, celebrating the 59th year that Duran’s ship from Spain sailed into New York Harbor.

Figure. Certificate and letter of recognition for Fernando’s 14 years of service in The Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
find something about which to chuckle or laugh aloud.

The Fourth of July was always a special time for Fernando, as this was the day his ship sailed into New York Harbor from Spain. As the ship, filled with many immigrants, approached the harbor, brilliant fireworks could be seen. The passengers at first thought that this was a welcome greeting. Only later did they discover that it was Independence Day for the United States of America. Reflecting on his first Fourth of July, Fernando would recall that he felt welcomed in his new home, the USA.

Fernando was born in Zaragoza, Spain, in the Central Pyrenees. He joined the Air Force at 16, lying about his age. After active duty, he joined the reserves and decided to go into nursing. His interest in psychiatric nursing took him to the United Kingdom from Spain. He then applied to come to the United States on a visa in 1957. Five years later, he became a citizen, starting a distinguished career in clinical, political, and professional venues.

In 1959, in Iowa, Fernando started the first psychiatric nursing community enterprise. He always kept abreast of the opportunities that the National Institute of Mental Health was offering and became a successful grant writer. One award took him to Vermont, where he started the first community mental health center. The Massachusetts Commissioner of Mental Health, Robert Okin, MD, recruited Fernando from Vermont to become an Assistant Commissioner. He later directed the Solomon Mental Health Center in Lowell, Massachusetts, and became Area Director of Mental Health for the Merrimack Valley (Figure).

Fernando was the first President of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA), which was formed by the Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services (JPN). Fernando served on the Editorial Board of JPN since I became Editor in 1981. He not only served as a reviewer of manuscripts submitted for publication, but wrote articles of his own, and an occasional editorial. He could be counted on to recruit potential authors and board members. He retired from his editorial board position in September 1993.

My late husband, Neil, usually accompanied me to meetings and conferences of professional organizations. Fernando and he would meet to chat or have a drink at the bar at the AAN and APNA meetings. Sometimes they talked about their very different styles regarding their family and professional lives. For Fernando, family was to be kept separate from professional organizations. Neil, on the other hand, became a sort of “adjunct” member of my various groups. Fernando would occasionally describe various aspects of his farming, such as his orchards and gardens.

Fernando’s widow, Therese, via a card and note, let me know that Fernando had died on July 25, 2016. When I spoke with her on the telephone, she let me know that Fernando had kept up the tradition of sailing in New York Harbor on the Fourth of July, but had passed away 21 days later. He had done this for 59 years.

Many of you reading this also knew Fernando and have your own collection of favorite stories. Hopefully, those of you who never knew him will find this tribute an important part of your learning about our leaders in psychiatric nursing.

Shirley A. Smoyak, RN, PhD, FAAN
Editor Emerita, JPN

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