Branimir Jernej passed away on May 29, 2010 in a motorcycle accident at the age of 59. The Ruder Bošković Institute lost an outstanding scientist and the School of Medicine a respected teacher. He was a real gentleman and, above all, a good man.

Dear Branko,

I am writing to you this letter, although I no longer write letters, nobody does any more. The last one I wrote was during my Military Service. I don’t remember whom to, probably to my mother. I do not know how to communicate with you, but I am still trying to, every single day. I hope to succeed by writing this letter.

The last time we saw each other was around 4 o’clock on the day you left on holiday, Friday, May 28, 2010, as usual, before the weekend. We were in my room, leaning on the window overlooking Ruder’s Park, attempting to sum up the events of the previous week and discussing the future and what we should do. As usual we were confronted with many changes – us old crusaders, tired of change. In fact we were tired of the fighting for changes, which long ago should have been a basic part of civilized life and not subject of a fight, even in science. Too tired of opening doors which had been opened so many times before. Even in Ruder. We were too old for illusions and false promises and too young to accept the existing situation. I was particularly pleased to see you ride off on your motorcycle and rid yourself of everyday work related problems. At least for a short time to forget work and those of us remaining.

The rain had stopped, roads were dry and everything appeared idyllic. I encouraged your idea to abandon yourself to the pleasure you felt in riding along deserted roads, riding your motorcycle for the sake of riding and not thinking about anything in particular. This was the way you gathered your strength to develop new scientific projects. Like so many times before, you listened to me.

It has been six months since you passed away and yet, nothing has changed. We are all right, particularly today, on a beautiful sunny, summer Thursday. I imagine us still together, Lipa, you and me by the automatic coffee vending machine. Our little tradition; one macchiato, one cappuccino with and one without sugar. We were laughing at something, I can’t remember what, because I find it difficult to remember amusing things now. People passing by, stop for a moment and exchange a few words or two. Suddenly Bubi comes running up and you throw a stick for him. You’re both so happy. You even came to see me yesterday, unexpectedly, in a dream. It was Friday again. You wanted us to meet, as usual, before the weekend. You came to my room and we were leaning on the window, overlooking Ruder’s Park, attempting to sum up the previous week and discussing future events. Only this time,
you brought good news to this old crusader. That all
those battles that we had fought had not been in vain,
even those that we had lost, and that peace had finally ar-
ived and that we had won. And that the time for battle
was now in the hands of the young. It was time for some
new youngsters. What about us? We can withdraw a little
and concentrate on work, on family and friends, in the
peace for which we had fought. I was not to worry. Before
you left you asked me about Maja. I hear from her and
see her quite often, and you can as usual be proud of her. At
that moment I wake up. The dream had gone away. You
were not here, although the peace that you had brought
with you in my dream remained, and still does today.

A sunny Thursday, and Bubi comes running up with
his tail in the air and your stick in his mouth. Now Lipa
and I throw your stick and avoid trying to explain any-
thing to him. We no longer order cappuccino with sugar,
and no longer argue about who paid the last time. People
come up to us and talk a little. Some no longer mention
you, some no longer think about you and only a few us
still expect you to appear in front of the coffee vending
machine, or at the doors of the laboratory. That’s life I
suppose. It appears to be true that time helps us forget
events, particularly unhappy ones. Nevertheless, you will
never be parted from us, your friends, who can never
erase your number from our mobile phones. You will al-
ways be here, and we will write a letter to you every day.

It’s hard for me now to achieve the peace of mind I en-
couraged you to find on that Friday afternoon, the 28th
May 2010. I know you would have forgiven me for every-
thing just as I would you. That’s why we were such good
friends for so long.

Danko

Branimir Jernej was born in 1951 in Zagreb, where he
attended classical primary school, Grammar School for
Mathematics and the School of Medicine. He graduated
in 1978, and in 1987 defended his doctoral thesis at the
Institute of Molecular Biology at the Ružer Bošković
Institute (2004–2005) and Vice-President of the Croatian Society for Neuroscience (2003–2010),
and a member of the following scientific societies: Society
for Neuroscience, Society of Biological Psychiatry, Sero-
tonin Club, Croatian Society for Neuroscience and the
Croatian Pharmacological Society.

Apart from his scientific work, he was always inter-
ested in lexicography, and he combined his wide medical
knowledge and knowledge of several foreign languages
in an English–Croatian Medical Dictionary, published by Školske Knjige, of which he was author. He was also
co-author of Italian–Croatian and Croatian–Italian dic-
tionaries, and co-translator of a textbook on biochemistry.
He was systematically engaged in Croatian pharmacologi-
cal and neuroscientific terminology, and within the frame-
work of COST programme, in which he participated as re-
presentative of the Republic of Croatia, he was initiator
of the idea of a multilingual dictionary on neuroscience.

And there is so much more...

All accidents are stupid and senseless. Yours has left us
with a sense of guilt, because we feel that we never said
all that we should have, and sorrow, which is particularly
intense in those of those of us who had the good fortune
to be your friend.

With sadness in our hearts and you in our thoughts.

Your friends,
Lipa Ćićin-Šain
Danko Orešković