MARIO ACUÑA
(1940-2009)

Mario Acuña was born on March 21, 1940, in Córdoba, Argentina. He earned a B. A. degree from the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba in 1958, an MSEE degree from the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán in 1967, and a Ph.D. from the Catholic University of America in 1974.

Acuña joined the staff of the Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) of NASA in the early 1970s, as a research scientist in the Space Plasmas and Planetary Magnetospheres Branches, where he soon became a Senior Astrophysicist. He was a major pioneer in the field of planetary magnetism, both from the experimental and the theoretical sides. He was also a co-investigator on the MESSENGER mission from the time of the team's first proposal 13 years ago.

He was a principal investigator on experiments flown on numerous spacecraft missions over the years, from the Pioneer 11 Fluxgate Magnetometer Experiment in 1973 to the Mars Global Surveyor Magnetic Field Experiment in 1994. His leadership to promote the use of spacecraft data by the world space scientists community took him to be the principal investigator of the Solar Terrestrial Energy Program.

An American citizen since 1994, he never forgot his grassroots. The Space Agency in Argentina (Comisión Nacional de Actividades Espaciales, CONEA) found permanent encouragement and counseling from Mario for any endeavor it may envisage. In the same line he was always willing to collaborate with space science groups in Latin America, where he helped build the Latin American Space Geophysics Association (ALAGE, in Spanish), where he was International Secretary at the time of his death. The proposal to become a member of our Editorial Council was immediately accepted.

Mario was also the recipient of many professional awards, including the Moe Schneebaum Memorial Award - the highest engineering award at GSFC-, the NASA Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal, and the NASA Distinguished Service Medal.

Dr. Mario H. Acuña passed away on March 5, 2009, after a lengthy and courageous battle against multiple myeloma, at his home, surrounded by his loved ones. His wife Barbara; his sons and daughter Jamie, Andrew, Daniel and Marta, and five grandchildren, with more on the way, outlive him.

His death is an irreparable loss to all those who pursue the progress of Space and Planetary Science. His life is a shining example of a man who could combine a brilliant professional career with dedication to his family and an enjoyment of the good things this world has to offer.

José Fco. Valdés Galicia