

# Newton Freire-Maia

## 1918-2003



Professor Newton Freire-Maia passed away on the May 10, 2003, at the age of 84, in Curitiba, State of Paraná, of complications arising from lung cancer. The feeling manifested by his friends was of surprise in front of this news, which, although not unexpected, all had wished to postpone forever. He left behind his wife, Professor Eleidi Alice Chautard Freire-Maia, and three children of his first marriage, with Flávia Freire-Maia - Regina Flávia, Maria de Fátima and Marco Domiciano. Another child, Newton Filho, is already deceased. He also had nine grandchildren.

Born on the June 29, 1918 at Boa Esperança, State of Minas Gerais, Newton Freire-Maia had been living in Paraná since 1951. When he graduated as a dentist, he had already decided to dedicate himself to Biology and Genetics. By appointment of Professor Pe. Jesus Santiago Moure, he accepted the invitation made by Professor Homero de Mello Braga to teach General Biology to Natural History students of the School of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters, and to set up a Genetics Laboratory, in order to continue, at the Federal University of Paraná, his research work on *Drosophila* population genetics started at the University of São Paulo. In 1958, the Genetics Laboratory became the Human Genetics Laboratory, and Professor Freire-Maia, together with his team, started investigating consanguineous marriages and limb malformations. So he pioneered the field of Human and Medical Genetics in Brazil. This group and its disciples gave rise to today's Department of Genetics of the Federal University of Paraná. Newton Freire-Maia was also a pioneer in establishing a Genetic Counseling Service.

Professor Freire-Maia concluded his Ph.D. in Biological Sciences in 1960, at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, with a thesis on consanguineous marriages in Brazil. Until the early 1970's, he was Head of the Genetics Department. Along his career, he published over two hundred full papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals and twenty books, besides twenty-two book chapters and many articles in newspapers and magazines.

With Dr. Marta Pinheiro, he created the Center for the Study of Ectodermal Dysplasias (CEDE), which soon became an international reference on that matter. He described twenty-three novel nosologic entities, in addition to creating a new definition and clinical classification. He published three books and several review articles on ectodermal dysplasias. When his work started, the total number of ectodermal dysplasias amounted to less than ten; now there are almost two hundred.

Professor Newton Freire-Maia's competence and scientific capacity need no proof beyond his rich curriculum vitae, so abundant in major achievements.

Newton Freire-Maia was a representative for Brazil at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, Switzerland. He was a full member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, president of honor of the Brazilian Genetics Society (SBG), of which he was a founding member and former president, as he was of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC). Currently, he was an Emeritus Professor of the Federal University of Paraná and one of the directors of the Science and Faith Institute, of which he was a co-founder. Along his career, he received a great number of awards and honors, from teaching and research institutions, from governmental agencies and from other institutions, both Brazilian and foreign.

Although he had retired twenty-two years ago, he never stopped working. He went to the Genetics Department every day. He enjoyed teaching and, even more, learning. He liked to write books, articles and reviews, and also letters, maintaining an intense correspondence with his vast circle of friends, which he knew so well how to cultivate.

A few things about his human qualities were already written, but there is a lot more left to say. His virtues left profound marks on all those who knew him. More than words, what will remain is the testimony and the longing of those who had the privilege of living in the company of this remarkable person. He had an extraordinary capacity to communicate, and his talks usually met a large and interested audience of all ages. Discreet, wise and restless, he was interested in everything. He used to question everything in a polite manner. His comments were straight-to-the-point and well humored. He had a concern for social issues, in quest of social justice.

Newton Freire-Maia taught us many lessons, and his attitudes and ideas allowed many seeds to sprout. The best way of honoring him is to follow his example of a rich and creative life, of fruitful and pleasant work, of action and creation always based on honesty, simplicity, humbleness and wisdom.

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