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# Professor Doctor César Timo-Iaria (07/25/1924 - 06/27/2005)

*A tribute to a classmate, founder of Brazilian neuroscience*

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ABSTRACT

This text is a posthumous tribute to Professor Doctor César Timo-Iaria, written by a classmate from the Escola Paulista de Medicina. The author recalls the honoree's struggle to earn his medical degree, working at night as a record librarian and newspaper proofreader, and praises his principles of honesty, integrity and dedication to teaching. He describes Timo-Iaria as the founder of Brazilian neuroscience, a demanding yet generous professor, a polyglot and a devotee of the classics of literature and music. He mentions his reform of the department at the USP Faculty of Medicine, the threat of forced retirement by the military regime in 1975, and his scientific discoveries concerning sleep, the atrial natriuretic factor and the regulation of blood glucose. The tribute, affectionate and erudite, celebrates the professor's character, his courage in the face of illness, and his intellectual legacy.

KEYWORDS: *césar timo-iaria; neuroscience; tribute; usp; physiology; memory*

I have the honor and the pride of having been a classmate —in the 15th Class of the Escola Paulista de Medicina, our glorious little "Escolinha," of 1952—of César, its brightest star.

I was a witness to the effort, sweat and sacrifice that it cost César to graduate in Medicine. Having to work, out of necessity, throughout his brilliant medical course, at night he was a record librarian at the now-defunct Rádio Kosmos, today América, at first, and later a proofreader for the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo," until the end of his studies.

The son of the humble but radically honest couple Maria and Luiz Timo-Iaria, he imbibed, with his mother's milk, the rigid principles of honor, integrity, decency and dignity that guided his entire life.

Without any religious belief (he believed only in science), though respecting all faiths, he was viscerally honest and was one of the most decent and dignified men I have known in my already long existence.

He had a horror of mediocrity; he always told me that no memory remained of the professors who demanded nothing—the "nice ones"—but that he would always remember, with longing and affection, those who demanded that he study.

He knew, however, how to value those who valued him; thus he mentored and trained a host of students in his Postgraduate, Master's and Doctoral courses, even helping some of them financially, without boasting of it or making a show of it. His dream, in fact, as he confided to me, was that his countless students would carry on his work and his research.

The reform he carried out in the Department he directed for so many years at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of São Paulo—he was the founder of Brazilian Neuroscience—left in admiration all who came to know of it.

Professor Dr. César Timo-Iaria was nearly forced into retirement, in 1975, by the military government of the time, after being denounced by a "colleague" as a communist!...

Fluent in English, French, Spanish and Italian, he wrote impeccable, refined, pure Portuguese.

The address with which he welcomed the newly elected members of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences in 2002 is a piece of oratorical art and erudition. I have with me, in fact, a piece of his writing in which he gives a true master class in Grammar and the Portuguese language.

He frequented the classics: Machado, Corção, Castro Alves, Dostoevsky, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes (he who was a true Don Quixote, tilting at the windmills of the often dinosaur-like scientific institutions not only of Brazil); he was also very fond of composers such as Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Mozart and the greatest of all, J. S. Bach.

One of the last of the Abencerrages of our Culture and our Science, he had an ardent love for the noble profession he practiced with such passion and such self-giving; teaching was his life.

Accompanied by his devoted wife Mariazinha, his companion of more than fifty years—no one could wish for a better squire—he traveled practically the whole world, giving his masterful lectures and conferences on those occasions.

"What elevates a man's character is firmness of principle. To be useful compels one to be good; it leads one to be steadfast; to be steadfast means to be strong. In this historic moment of human life, when personal self-denial free of lofty idealism grows scarce, when the wave of selfishness rises overwhelmingly, when an aimless and dishonorable indifference at times replaces convictions and the highest spiritual interests, and when man often feels betrayed, it is beautiful and comforting to recall the lives of those who labor in the harvest of Science with a capital S, like you, most resplendent member of that army," dear friend.

The journal Ciência e Saúde, the official publication of INCISA, in its issue number 15, of April/June 1999, which pays tribute to Prof. Dr. César Timo-Iaria, contains, in addition to numerous articles by the great professor, two others about him: one by Dra. Marisa Amato, which ends with a phrase that, in my opinion, is a true gem: "This is Professor César Timo-Iaria." And so he was, Doctor Marisa; and another, by the equally great Professor Irany Novah Moraes, himself a luminary of our Medical Science, which takes as its motto the Latin phrase of the poet Virgil: "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas" (Happy is he who has been able to know the causes of things), in which, besides discoursing on what it means to be a paradigm, Prof. Irany speaks of the most illustrious Professor of Physiology of the cultural medical elite of our country, Prof. Dr. César Timo-Iaria.

You, César, who with such stoicism—a stoicism without equal—and with such dignity faced the inescapable illness that, by a cruel irony of fate, claimed you, go in peace, dear friend. May the generous Brazilian soil that now receives you in its bosom lie gently upon you. As Ecclesiastes says: "Your memory will endure, for us, as long as the sun."

As you yourself said in your poem "Ciclo": "longing, the last of sorrows."

That is the sorrow that will remain with us; but the examples of your exemplary life will remain with us too.

You fulfilled, with unsurpassable brilliance, the mission you had to accomplish here. The discoveries alone that you brought to our Medical Science concerning sleep (you discovered the sleep-generating center, the atrial natriuretic factor, the mechanisms that strictly regulate blood glucose, and the mechanism of hunger, among so many other discoveries) would suffice to distinguish you; but you did much more: witty and eclectic, you even wrote about the history of pizza!

Thank you for having existed and for having given all of us so many lessons, César!

Until one day, FRIEND!

Newton Alves

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