

Seventh February 2012. The message I had feared receiving for the last few days finally came. Professor David Ferreira had died. Portuguese Science was mourning. José Francisco David Ferreira was born in 1929, and all his life was guided by the principles of patriotic romanticism. He had the ambition of being useful to his countrymen and he took science as a means to help develop his country. When he finished his medical degree in 1952, he decided to pursue a research career at the faculty. He was awarded a scholarship by the French government and in 1955 he carried out an internship at the "*Institut de Reserches sur le Cancer*", in Villejuif. For 3 years he was part of a team recognized worldwide as a pioneer in the use of the electron microscope to study the biology of cancer cells. Back in Lisbon, he struggled to raise funds for the installation of the first electron microscope in Portugal, which was achieved thanks to the sponsorship of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. He defended his PhD thesis at the Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon, presenting an original study on electron microscopy, which earned him the maximum score of 20 marks. Soon after, he had the courage to leave a secure career at the Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon to chase his dream of developing his own scientific projects. He did not fear the adventure of going and working in the United States, taking his young family along. He was Guest Researcher at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda between 1962 and 1965. His project involved searching for viruses in biopsies of liver cancers, and this led to important discoveries on the interaction of the viruses with host cells. He returned to Lisbon with the same patriotic motivation of his youth: he was determined to have his own research group and guide new generations of scientists. He created and directed the Laboratory of Cell Biology of the Biology Centre of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which quickly became a national reference. Successive generations of young people who would become Cell Biology and Histology lecturers in all Portuguese universities received their training at this laboratory. In 1974, he was invited to rejoin the Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon and was appointed Full Professor in 1979. He was Vice-Rector of the University of Lisbon between 1997 and 2001. While at Faculty, David Ferreira set up the Office for the Support of Scientific Research with the programme "Education through Science" and the Centre for Molecular Biology and Pathology which, in 2001, was the forerunner of the Institute of Molecular Medicine.

Today, Portuguese society is proud of its young artists who receive international awards. But the present success of Portuguese science was built upon a past that must not be ignored. In the 1960s and 1970s, a handful of men and women like David Ferreira, passionate about taming the frontier of the unknown, relinquished their brilliant careers abroad in order to dedicate their lives to keeping alive the flame of scientific research in Portugal. It was thanks to this hard core of persistent persons that the current research institutes came into being, and it was the disciples of those men and women who became the

professors who attracted the present generation of Portuguese scientists to becoming researchers.

It was thanks to David Ferreira that I discovered the world of science. I remember the year 1977, when I joined the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon. Sitting in the front row of an inhospitable and degraded amphitheatre, I avidly took in the Cell Biology classes given by Professor David Ferreira in the early evening. He told us stories of discoveries made by people whom we came to know by name. And I dreamed, how will it feel like to discover something? On completion of my final examinations, the Professor invited me to do an internship at his research laboratory in the Gulbenkian Institute of Science. To this day, I have never left that laboratory. With him, I learned the value of freedom and respect in professional work. Above all, David Ferreira inspired me to dare to break traditions, to waive the alleged safety of predictable daily life and venture out in search of fulfilling my dreams.

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