



SONIA MACHADO DE CAMPOS DIETRICH

(27/01/1935 – 10/08/2012)

Sonia Dietrich: a life dedicated to science

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the death of our mentor, friend and colleague Sonia Machado de Campos Dietrich. Professor Dietrich passed away peacefully while sleeping due to a heart attack. She was 77 years old and left two daughters (Flávia and Paula), one son (Peter) and six grandchildren.

Sonia Dietrich was one of the greatest contributors to the establishment of Plant Physiology and Biochemistry in Brazil. She had a degree in Natural History (previous name of the Biology courses in Brazil), from the University of São Paulo – Brazil, in 1957. In 1960, following her husband Peter Dietrich, she had the opportunity to work at the University of Buenos Aires – Argentina, specializing in Organic Chemistry, particularly in carbohydrate metabolism, at the Instituto Fundación Campomar, directed by Luis Federico Leloir, who won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1970 for the discovery of the mechanism of sucrose biosynthesis. From 1964 to 1966 she worked with Biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and from 1967 to 1969 did her PhD in biochemistry, working at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, with the biosynthesis of alkaloids.

Sonia Dietrich conducted the consolidation of the Section of Plant Physiology and Biochemistry (actually *Núcleo de Pesquisa em Fisiologia e Bioquímica*) at the Institute of Botany (IBt), São Paulo State, one of the most important laboratories in plant carbohydrates in Brazil. Sonia worked as a scientific researcher at the IBt from 1959 to 1992, when she officially retired. However, she remained at the institution as visiting researcher until her last day of life, being Emeritus Researcher since 2007.

Her leadership pioneered the studies of carbohydrates in tropical plants from several Brazilian biomes. She not only conducted projects and supervised students that lead to the discovery of new sources of polysaccharides in plant species from the Brazilian biodiversity, but also conducted experiments on the relationship of these compounds to plant defense and responses to the environment.

Sonia Dietrich was an important scientific figure nationwide, being involved with the policies of the National Council of Science and Technology (CNPq), where she was a member of the panel of Botany and also member of Advisory Board. She was a key person in the São Paulo State, as she served for many years as the president of the commission that regulates the carrier of Scientific Researcher of the State government, the *Comissão Permanente de Tempo Integral* (CPRTI). Known for some as the “iron lady”, she fought for production of science with high quality not only when she acted as the president of CPRTI,

but also in all opportunities that she had to judge scientific proposals of all kinds as well as manuscripts submitted for publication in scientific journals worldwide. Her guidance towards high scientific quality led to the improvement of science in all the 18 Research Institutes of the State of São Paulo.

Energetic and tireless, she printed the accuracy and quality to everything she did. She was supervisor of grad students for the courses of Molecular Biology from the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP, former *Escola Paulista de Medicina*), of Plant Biology at *Universidade Estadual de Campinas* (Unicamp) and of Botany at *Universidade de São Paulo* (USP), having supervised 12 MSc and 15 Doctoral students during her carrier. She published 102 scientific articles and 7 book chapters, having performed studies with cell walls of fungi and plants, carbohydrates from underground reserve organs and seeds and defensive responses in plants.

She received several awards and titles, such as the Schering Prize Awarded by the Brazilian Society of Microbiology twice, in 1978 and 1983 and ABiFARMA – Brazilian Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (1979). In 1998 she was awarded as a commander of the order of scientific merit, of the Presidency of the Republic. Sonia has been head of the Department of Plant Physiology and Biochemistry and Director of the Institute of Botany. She was the creator and General Coordinator of the postgrad course in Plant Biodiversity and Environment of the Institute of Botany, being Provost of the post grad course during its first 3 years of activity.

Her scientific expertise, her enthusiasm and spirit of leadership have become recognized worldwide. She participated in various committees and national and international councils such as the National Committee of Brazil for the Latin American Network of Biological Sciences, Advisor of the International Foundation of Science, the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (Third World Academy of Science – TWAS), the National Geographic Society and the Latin American Network of Botany, of which she was one of the founders and Coordinator. She was also a member of *Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad* – CONABIO, of the Ministry of the Environment and the Legal Amazon. Sonia was also a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, Vice President of the Federal Council of Biology and member of the Editorial Board of *Ciência e Cultura* and of the Brazilian Journal of Biology. In an era in which the internationalization of science was not a priority, Sonia with her wide vision of the future, already acknowledged the importance of external collaborations to conduct research. She stimulated many colleagues and students to do training abroad in centers of excellence in Europe and United States, playing a key role in the internationalization of the Brazilian botany.

From 2009 on, fearing the extinction of *Sociedade Botânica de São Paulo* – SBSP, Sonia accepted the challenge of becoming the Editor-in-Chief of the *Revista Brasileira de Botânica* (2009) and its President (2010). She revitalized the society and the journal and succeeded, in 2012, to edit the first volume of the journal, Brazilian Journal of Botany – BrazJBot, entirely in English. Just a few hours before she passed away, she was celebrating the signature of a contract between the BrazJBot and Springer. Who had the opportunity to get closer to her, knew that Sonia was a brave woman, with strong personality and endowed with an unusual wit. She was cheerful, fun, passionate, companion, friend and careful mother and a dedicated grandmother. Sonia left a huge legacy that will never be forgotten and many examples to be followed. Beyond any doubt, her passing means an enormous loss to the Brazilian science as well as for Latin American and the world.

Sonia Dietrich died when she was doing what she loved most: fighting for higher quality of science and writing papers.

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