

# Iseu Affonso da Costa, pioneer of the brazilian heart surgery

## *My Father, Our Pride!*

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RBCCV 44205-1260

To pay a posthumous tribute to my father leads me into conflicting emotions. In the same breath, I am taken into pain and sadness of the irretrievable loss. I felt myself filled with joy and pride to honor him on behalf of the Brazilian Society of Cardiovascular Surgery.

Iseu de Santo Elias Affonso da Costa was born on October 27, 1926, in the city of Paranaguá, Paraná State. He was born to Francisco Jejuhy Affonso da Costa and Iva Pereira Corrêa. He moved with his family to Curitiba when he was a teenager. After starting medical school at the State of Paraná School of Medicine (1945-1947), he graduated from the School of Medicine at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1950. A remarkable feature of his personality was the knowledge. He was very knowledgeable in general culture as well as scientific expertise. In medical school, he was the recipient of Montenegro and Prof. Paulo Edmundo Vasconcellos awards, due to his best grades in the fourth-year of medical school in the year, in the disciplines of surgery, respectively.

His medical residency was done in São Paulo, where he was the first disciple of Professor Euryclides de Jesus Zerbini, by whom he has always cultivated special admiration. Ever since that time, he used to tell me some passages, terrific and even "heroic" stories from the pioneers of the national cardiac surgery.

To improve his knowledge, at that time, in the emerging specialty of cardiovascular surgery, he was a Heller's scholarship student, at the Stanford University School of Medicine and at the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation in Düsseldorf and Munich, and a visiting professor at the University of California, Irvine.

His professional career has always been linked to academic activities. When his residency at the Clinics Hospital of the University of São Paulo was completed, he began his teaching duties as a teaching instructor at the medical school in the State of Paraná School of Medicine in 1957. Over that same year, he had a Ph.D. in Operative Technique and Experimental Surgery, with the thesis "Contribution to the experimental study of the use of nylon prostheses and homografts preserved in ethanol, replacing



*Dr. Iseu: A whole life dedicated to the cardiac surgery*

segments of the thoracic aorta." Interestingly, more than 50 years later, our research group at PUCPR is still investigating the effect of the ethyl alcohol as an anti-calcification treatment in biological prostheses, and in the decellularization technology and tissue engineering with valve homografts, and many of our "conclusions" have been demonstrated in his original study.

In 1961 he was transferred as an Assistant Professor in the 2nd Surgical Clinic. He attained all the university career

positions. Finally, in 1978, he was approved in a concourse for Full Professor, presenting a thesis entitled “*Mitral valve replacement by prosthesis Lileh-Kaster*”. He retired from the University in 1994. During his academic life, he presented several subjects in 165 scientific events in Brazil and abroad and served as a lecturer, relator, or director 174 times. He has written or contributed to 64 medical studies and five book chapters.

As I have been a resident in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery at UFPR, I could appreciate at hand his activities of daily living at the Clinics Hospital. In addition to operating, he taught undergraduate and graduate students; he did teaching rounds in the wards and participated in surgical and clinic meetings, not to mention the bureaucratic activities, such as the Head of the Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery Disciplines, Head of the Surgery Department, Coordinator of the Master Degree program on Surgery, Coordinator of the Health Sciences sector, among others. Charismatic, he had the admiration of his peers, residents, students, and the hospital personnel. His consonant, interested, and direct ability to be on good terms with everyone around him, regardless of the other being a senior university professor or an employee with the simplest tasks used to direct a person’s attention to him. This attitude was even more remarkable with patients with whom he loved to speak in German, Polish, and even in Latin. Watching him in the wards was a constant lesson of the importance of physician/patient relationship, something that seems to be lacking in the current medical practice.

He was one of the pioneers of cardiac surgery in Paraná, and he was also responsible for structuring, in 1967, the Heart Surgery Service of the Hospital de Caridade e Santa Casa de Curitiba (Holy House of Mercy Hospital), and in 1975, the service of the children’s heart surgery at the Hospital Pequeno Príncipe. Despite having been involved in all subspecialties of cardiac surgery, he has had a special interest in both heart valve pathologies and heart transplantation. Under his guidance and support, we could develop the “Cardioprostheses” and the Human Heart Valve Bank of the Santa Casa of Curitiba. He was also a great supporter of the establishment of the Health Alliance PUCPR-Holy House of Mercy approved on August 27, 1999. Since, then, he has held until his death, the post of the vice-superintendent of the Brotherhood of Holy House of Mercy of Curitiba.

Apart from heart surgery, he has been actively involved in many cultural and associative projects. He was president of the Parana Medical Association from 1973 to 1975, vice-president of the Brazilian Medical Association, Counselor of the Brazilian Society of Cardiovascular Surgery and President of Parana Society of Cardiac Surgery, Chairman of the Cultural Board of the Foundation Santos Lima and academic founder of the Parana Academy of Medicine. At

the Regional Medical Council-CRM-PR has left his mark, when along with Dr. Charles Ravazzani, he has made the permanent exhibition “*Pioneers of Medicine of Paraná*”, opened in 2003. Located on the first floor of the building, the 30 panels show a rich historical record of Medicine in the state. He was a Member of the Historical and Geographic Institute of Parana for over 30 years, and he was his 2<sup>nd</sup> vice-president. He was passionately fond of the History of Parana and, in particular, the History of Medicine. He has written numerous articles on the history of medicine in the State of Parana published in the newspapers of Curitiba, the capital of the State of Parana, and in bulletins of the Institute of History and Geography of Paraná and the State of Paraná Academy of Medicine, in addition to the following books: “*Szymon Kossobudzki – Patrono do Ensino da Cirurgia no Paraná*” (1989), “*História da Cirurgia Cardíaca Brasileira*” (1996), “*O Ensino da Medicina na Universidade Federal do Paraná*”, with Eduardo Corrêa Lima (1997-2007) e “*Patronos da Academia Paranaense de Medicina*” (2003-2010) e os opúsculos “*O primeiro alemão de Curitiba*” and “*Os descendentes de Julia Guilhermina Muller Caillot e José de Santo Elias Affonso da Costa*” (2007). He received the title of Emeritus Professor from the Federal University of Parana, in 1993. In 1995, he was awarded with the Certificate of Honor for his services granted by the Clinics Hospital (Hospital de Clínicas), Federal University of Parana. He was given the title of Honorary Citizen of Curitiba, in 1999.

He was devoted to his family. He was an example of patriarch. He has always taken care of everyone, and he was wise in his guidance, without the need to impose his ideas. When one of the children did something that seemed wrong to him, he did not punish, but he simply made a funny comment which was much more remarkable than a censure. Thus, he led the family in a natural way, and he always had everyone around him.

In order to fulfill his accomplishments, he always counted on the love and unconditional support of his wife Arlette, his inseparable companion for 52 years. Multilingual, he was a fan of the Curitiba Foot Ball club, also known as “*coxa-branca*”. He had a refined sense of humor; he loved a good chat, and including cinema, classical music, painting, cigar, pipe; he was a connoisseur of high quality wine and whiskey. He died of stroke in Curitiba, in November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at the aged 84. I am convinced that he was a happy man, and fulfilled his mission fully. He left a widow, Arlete Diniz Affonso da Costa, three children, Francisco, Julia and Andrew, and four grandchildren, Ana Claudia, Ana Beatriz, Peter and Antonia. On behalf of the family, our eternal love. On behalf of SBCCV, thank you for your authentic leadership, legacy and lessons of life.

**\*Full Member of SBCCV**