

## OBITUARY

## Marco Fraccaro

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**Marco Fraccaro – Born 26 September 1926  
Died 2 April 2008**

Marco Fraccaro, who died on April 2, 2008 at the age of 81 years, was one of the pioneers of human cytogenetics. Marco was essentially a Pavia man. His home was there; he attended the local gymnasium and then the Medical School of the University of Pavia. He graduated in Medicine in 1950 and became assistant professor in the Institute of Pathological Anatomy where he came under the influence of the internationally known geneticist Buzzati-Traverso.

In 1954, he obtained a British Council Fellowship to study genetics and joined Professor Lionel Penrose in the Galton Laboratory, University College, London. He immediately felt at home at UCL in the company of a group of postgraduate students from all over the world. Marco worked with Penrose and the mathematician CAB Smith on the genetics of human birth weight. His work impressed Penrose who recommended him for a post in the newly founded Institute of Human Genetics in Uppsala in Sweden, under the direction of Professor Jan Böök. Marco served as Deputy Director of the Institute from 1955 to 1958. It was here that he was introduced to cytogenetics, to his Swedish wife, Inga, and to his life-long friend Jan Linsten.

His time in Uppsala resulted in numerous papers on human cytogenetics, many co-authored with Jan Linsten. These were mainly focused on sex chromosome abnormalities, especially in females with abnormal physical and sexual development. However, in addition, Marco published on a wide range of other topics related to human genetics

including the distribution of specific types of congenital malformations in defined populations, and the effect of radiation on chromosomes of cells both *in vivo* and *in vitro*.

In 1960, he was offered a position to oversee a research cytogenetics laboratory in the newly formed MRC Population Genetics Research Unit in Oxford headed by Professor Alan Stevenson. In Oxford, Marco joined a group including John Edwards and George Fraser and, as well as overseeing the cytogenetics laboratory, teaching the many visitors the skills of cytogenetics and attending genetic counselling clinics, Marco became a life member of the Senior Common Room of Exeter College, following in the footsteps of his father. Marco loved Oxford and always spoke of it with great fondness. In 1997, he published a small book of quotations called 'Oxford for strangers of all sorts'.

In 1962, Marco returned to Pavia to lead a Group for research in human cytogenetics supported by NATO and the University of Pavia. He spent the years until his retirement in 2001 as a Professor in the Medical Faculty of the University, responsible for the teaching of Biology and Medical Genetics and for a continuous output of highly regarded publications in human genetics. Marco was very active in other aspects of the University and served as Master of Collegio Cairoli for many years.

Marco had an early interest in art, latterly directed almost exclusively to contemporary art. This interest was enhanced during the time he lived in England but reached full blossoming during his time as Master of Collegio Cairoli. Every corner of the college was filled with graphics, paintings and sculptures and these became an integrated part of all student activities. An art gallery was also created in the college, in which a number of exhibitions have taken place over the years. In 2001, he became Master Emeritus, but remained responsible for the library and for the artistic activities of the college. Marco, in fact, gained substantial and widespread renown as an art and book collector, and a part of his collection can now be seen in the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto.

During the last six months of his life Marco was preparing for the next exhibition – '80 Artists Reflect the Light' – which was formally opened in May this year. This exhibition serves as a very fitting memorial to Marco Fraccaro, a much loved and respected human geneticist and a man of many talents.

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