

Historical Article

Fairbanks Barbosa: A Pilgrim's Trajectory

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Ten minutes from Boston, in USA, there is a very old wooden house open to public visitation known as Fairbanks House. It is a museum that rescues the origin and history of the first Fairbanks, pilgrims that left England to create the former colonies in America in 1633. Thirty-one passengers with the last name Fairbanks were in Mayflower's list, the legendary sea craft that left England with the Calvinist renegades to land in Virginia.

Before leaving, the 31 pilgrims, who called themselves "saints", took a solemn fast. Only after that and a special blessing, they felt prepared for the trip towards freedom. Half of them did not survive the environmental vicissitudes in their arrival to America. It was not the fade of our history main characters.

Almost two centuries later, in 1825, a North American pilgrims' descendant, George Edward Fairbanks, came ashore at Rio de Janeiro's port, coming from the East. He was a doctor from Edinburgh Royal Academy of Medicine, in Scotland, where he graduated. In Brazil, he chose Bahia State to live and to work as a Public Health Council member.

One of George's grandchildren, Jorge Cezimbra Fairbanks, graduated from the School of Medicine of Bahia, the single one at that time in the country. In 1884, he moved to São Simão, a little city close to Campinas, São Paulo State, that was in deep need for doctors. Jorge Fairbanks' third daughter, Adalgiza, or Tintinha, her family nickname, married Doctor Luiz Gonzaga Vianna Barbosa. The couple had eight children.

Among them, the second was Jorge Fairbanks Barbosa, an athletic, energetic and restless boy that would be the founder of the Head and Neck Surgery specialty in Brazil, specialty he implanted in 1952, at Central Institute of the Cancer Hospital (at that time in operation at the Hospital of Santa Cruz, in São Paulo). Master in his specialty, whenever he found a brilliant disciple, he would say: "This one has the sacred fire!"

He was for sure referring to the passion that takes a doctor to a complete devotion to his occupation. Jorge Fairbanks Barbosa, descendant of an endless lineage of doctors, had this kind of feeling as nobody had.

Born in São Simão city, São Paulo State countryside, on June 23, 1915, he got his Medical Degree in the University of São Paulo in 1939. He had to work to conclude his studies. His father did not want him to study Medicine, because his first son, Renato Fairbanks Barbosa, two years older, had not been the first of its entrance list. This was considered a dishonor.

Journalist graduated in 1985 by the School of Communications and Arts (ECA-USP), she has already been part of the most important broadcasting systems in the country (UOL, Folha de S.Paulo, Editora Globo, Veja magazine, Jornal do Brasil, O Estado de S.Paulo, MTV). She has recently worked at the Cancer Hospital on the books edition "A Half Century of Cancer Research - the Cancer Hospital and Institute Ludwig Partnership" and "The Child with Cancer - What Should We Know?", published by the Cancer Hospital.

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Figure 1 - Fairbanks (second, from the left to the right) in the wedding party of Antonio Bertelli (at his side, from left to the right), member of Fairbanks' staff

Jorge worked hard as voluntary assistant of Otorhinolaryngology at the School of Medicine, as a teacher – he taught Chemistry, Physics and Biology at the Rio Branco High School and married a former-student, Maria Aparecida Alves Cardoso. His father had faced serious difficulties in his own farm administration, so he did all he could to solve the financial problems.

Little by little, he became a very good otorhinolaryngologist, in the clinical board of Santa Casa de Misericórdia de São Paulo, team of Mario Ottoni de Rezende. He was one the first physician to accomplish surgeries for deafness in São Paulo.

However, nothing would be comparable to the success reached by Fairbanks in the Head and Neck Surgery Service, which he headed up from 1953 to 1968, at the Cancer Hospital. He was invited by Antonio Prudente, its founder, as far as in 1952. Surgical techniques did not exist at that time. Fairbanks created them himself.

He made experiments and trainings in corpses, at night, after work, and for dawns out. Doing so, he gained great ability. He carried out “incredible surgeries made in only one block with cervical emptying, in a way that I have never seen”, says Josias de Andrade Sobrinho, 75-year old, head and neck surgeon that has acted from 1955 to 1968 as Fairbanks Barbosa assistant at the Cancer Hospital and nowadays he is the Teaching and Research Commission coordinator of the Hospital of Heliópolis.

Tireless, demanding, Fairbanks arrived at the Cancer Hospital invariably at 7:00 AM sharp. He was a strong man, well built, of low stature, glasses and willful mouth. Disciplined, he tried his best to instill into everybody the same procedure. He created routines in his department as the one called “the big book” - all the doctors should write down their patients' report, an embryonic form of cancer epidemiological evaluation. Data were annually consolidated.

He was criterious in relation to Pathological Anatomy exams. According to Humberto Torloni, current research director of the Cancer Hospital, who in the fifties occupied the director position of the Pathological Anatomy services, Fairbanks, first of all, was an oncologist. “When he had an exam in his hands, he wanted to know everything, differentiation degree, infiltration patterns, vascular or nervous compromise. He did all this in the 50's. He did not accept an exam without these informations in details.”

Fairbanks Barbosa's severity was famous among their colleagues and students. “I got tired of getting scissors beatings on my hands just for disturbing some surgical procedure” says Luiz Carlos Sanvitto, 68, surgeon from Head and Neck service. “Nobody dared to be late for a procedure”, he comments.

Fairbanks made efforts to transmit acquired knowledge, the taste for research. Weekly, he gathered his team in his house to study together a previously chosen theme. We used to summarize unpublished medical material from a team member or we chose another theme”, Sanvitto says, that also recalls the procedure adopted by Fairbanks when he was preparing Congress presentations. “He did 90% of the work team and divided the honors with us. Science honesty.”

Owner of a brilliant intelligence and a great charisma, Fairbanks was always willing to put into practice new experiences, to review concepts or to review positions. “He was not ashamed of calling a plastic surgery specialist to help in the closing of a surgery, if he thought it was necessary”, reports Josias de Andrade Sobrinho.

In Front of Jaguars and Anacondas (Sucuris)

The great physical courage, demonstrated by Fairbanks in adventures with some members of the Head and Neck Department, has contributed to create around him a mythical aura.

Once a year, some of his direct collaborators were chosen by their chief to go to Mato Grosso Swampland (Pantanal) (Figure 2). There, they gaped at the behavior of the flawless surgeon who was



Figure 2 - Fairbanks at the Pantanal

capable to walk days and days in the bushes in search of a wild pig, or to run kilometers after a jaguar, until falling exhausted. "Fairbanks was an athlete *civilized Brazilian Indian (caboclo)*, that loved the bushes, guitar and pamphlet literature", tells Josias de Andrade Sobrinho. "Some of their histories in Pantanal are comic."

Fairbanks liked to face jaguars and anacondas. Once, he posted himself in front of one restive feline, ahead of other hunters, so that he was also cornered. He was saved by one of his companions that shot it in the head. In another occasion, also in Pantanal, he went out with a boat without noticing that in its interior there was a huge snake (sucuri), more than six-meter length. Discovering that he was not alone, he decided to face the creature. He picked a boat oar and struck it in the snake's head until sinking

with the boat - himself and the anaconda alive - into the river.

Fairbanks also loved underwater fishing. He practiced diving and harpoon fishing in Rio and São Paulo Atlantic coast, always followed by members of his team. Once, he saw in the water a big fish, which he thought to be an ouzel. He had harpooned it and then he found out that it was a shark. "It was very frightfull", his son relates, the otorhinolaryngologist Ivan Fairbanks Barbosa.

Fairbanks' taste for simplicity contrasted with the elegance of another legendary member of the Cancer Hospital, the full professor of the Pelvic Surgery Department, Fernando Gentil, who had lived abroad, liked to play tennis, to practice Jiu-jitsu and imported cars. "Fairbanks would say that if the Northeasterner threatened him with Jiu-jitsu, he would bring his gun (garrucha)", Sanvitto says. "But their disputes were just a game, a theater play to cheer up the youngsters. Actually they were friends, and they maintained great respect one for the other", says Sanvitto, that caught demonstrations of friendship between them, although they had open demonstrations of competition. In 1968, Fairbanks Barbosa's gilded times in the Cancer Hospital ended. He left the service to lead the Head and Neck Department of Beneficencia Portuguesa Hospital.

Fairbanks did his own way, he had more than a hundred articles pulished in several countries and wrote technical books. Standing out, among the publications in Brazil and out of it: "Surgical Treatment for Head and Neck Tumors", edited in New York in 1974, by Grune & Stratton; and "Cervical Emptying and Their Problems", of Fundo Editorial Próciénx, 1962.

He founded in 1967 the Brazilian Society of Head and Neck Surgery, being its first president. He was a member of São Paulo Association of Medicine; titular member of São Paulo Academy of Medicine; fellow of the International College of Surgeons; president of the ORL Department of São Paulo Association of Medicine; foreign corresponding member of the Head and Neck Surgeons Society; fellow of College International des Chirurgiens (France). He was a corresponding member of American Academy of Plastic and Reconstructive

Surgery, indicated by John Conley , of Pack Medical Group of New York, and others.

He has received several prizes since the 50's, among them the Oswaldo Cruz prize, in 1957, with the work "Tumors of the jaw and of the alveolar process of the superior maxilla"; Mario Ottoni Rezende, in 1958, with the work "Laringoceles"; the Great Cup of Silver, offered by the Medical Order of Italy, in the International Festival of Scientific Movies, in Salerno, with the film "Operation Pull-Through"; the "Bucranio d'Argente", in the Mostra Internazionale Cinematográfica d'Arte of Venice, with the same film already mentioned; the São Lucas Medal, and many other prizes.

He married his former-student, Maria Aparecida Alves Cardoso, on December 23rd, 1939. They had a son Ivan Cardoso Fairbanks Barbosa, born on April 14, 1941, graduated by the School of Medicine of USP and he has followed his father specialty. He's the one who narrates his father's last moments.

Fairbanks Barbosa had some surgeries done. In the end of July 1977, he was operated on of a parotid cancer. He had decided to take a bath when arriving home. He did not have time for the expected rest. During the bath, the doctor felt a strong pain in the chest, diagnosed as a pre cordial pain originated in the main trunk of the coronary artery. Heart surgery became necessary because of the 90% obstruction.

Jorge Fairbanks Barbosa developed the so called "lung shock", a fatal postoperative complication in those times. He spent one week in the Intensive care unit, lucid, writing notes, discussing solutions for his own case with the doctors on duty. But there was nothing else to be done. He died at the age of 62, on August 4, 1977.

Bibliography

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