

## Obituary

### Maria Victoria de la Cruz, 1916–1999



*Maria Victoria de la Cruz*

“I believe that human beings represent the interaction between socioeconomic and historical context in which they live. I was born in Cuba at the beginning of the century. My father, lawyer and notary, used to teach me every day literature and history and I, as an autodidact, studied biology in his library...”

These words are at the beginning of the curriculum vitae of Dr Maria Victoria de la Cruz, pioneer of cardiac embryology, who died in Mexico City on December 1, 1999. Maria Victoria graduated in Medicine at the University of Habana in 1943. In 1945, she moved from Cuba to the National Institute of Embryology in Mexico, attracted by the studies on electrocardiography carried on by Dr Demetrio Sodi-Pallares. In 1950, she began her studies on cardiac embryology, working at the Carnegie Institute of Washington and at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Returning to Mexico, she then headed the Laboratory of Experimental Embryology at the Institute of Cardiology in Mexico City until 1977. Subsequent to this period, she continued her

studies on embryology and anatomy of congenital cardiac malformations at the Central University of Venezuela, and at the Hospital Ramon y Cajal in Madrid. In 1983, she returned to Mexico City, working this time at the Hospital Infantil Federico Gomes, where she remained active until a few days before her death.

Her career as a researcher encompassed the great achievements in cardiac embryology of the last decades, many of which stemmed from her laboratory. To mention but a few landmarks in embryology and morphology which she established, she helped clarify the components of the straight tube heart, the embryology of the endocardial cushions of the atrioventricular canal, the development of the primitive ventricular septum, segmental analysis, the morphogenesis of the ventricular outflow tract, and coronary arterial anomalies in congenitally malformed hearts. Her personal life mirrored the dramatic and significant events which engulfed the Hispano-American world in the Twentieth Century. Her Spanish husband was an anti-fascist refugee from the Spanish Civil War, and she was deeply concerned with the Cuban Revolution and contemporary Mexican history.

With her death, the international community of paediatric cardiology has lost an extraordinary scientist. Her students, colleagues, and those who have had the honour and privilege of knowing her personally, lose a reference figure who was, at the same time, a teacher and a friend. Due to her extensive classical education, she could converse with the same competence about history, art and literature, as well as embryology and cardiac anatomy. Great was her enthusiasm for scientific research, and strong her hope of a better future for all the people of South America.

She had a strong character, and her judgements were determined, but she was also capable of great generosity and sweetness. Nobody who is familiar with her scientific contributions will ever forget her teachings, and those who have met her will forever remember her fascinating personality.

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