

F. Clarke Fraser (1920–2014)

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In the summer of 1967, I was lucky enough to spend the summer as a medical student in the laboratory of Dr. Charles Scriver at the Montreal Children's Hospital. It was at this time that I had the privilege of first interacting with the other legend of human genetics in Canada, F. Clarke Fraser. McGill University was indeed fortunate to have these two giants in the same institution at the same time.

With the death of Clarke on December 17, 2014, we lost the "father" of medical genetics in Canada. In 1950, Clarke established the Division of Medical Genetics at the Montreal Children's Hospital—the first in the country. He was president of the American Society of Human Genetics (1962), the Teratology Society (1962), and the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists (1980). He headed the working group of genetics and prenatal diagnosis of the Canadian Royal Commission on New Reproductive Tech-

nologies (1990). He was appointed fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (1966) and officer of the Order of Canada (1985), awarded the Prix du Québec (1999) and four honorary degrees, and inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame (2012).

Clarke was an extraordinary role model and teacher. He was intensely curious about new ideas and never dismissed an unusual thought because it did not fit into current models. Rather, he wondered whether there would be a way to test whether or not it had substance. Clarke had an ability to simplify the complex and to focus on important medical and human issues. He had a marvelous sense of humor, along with great warmth and kindness.

He had an influence on almost every area of North American human and medical genetics thought and practice. He was a champion of genetic counseling and developed the model of non-directive counseling. He conducted pioneering work on the teratogenicity of cortisone in mice and articulated the multifactorial threshold model for multifactorial disease. He trained many Canadian and American leaders in medical genetics.

I am reluctant to go on in detail about Clarke's personal life or his perspectives on life because in 2008, at the age of 88, he published an autobiography.¹ Clarke cared very much about the written word, and this biography should be obligatory reading for anyone in the field of medical genetics. In it, he displays the brilliance, honesty, candor, warmth, and humor for which he was so loved and respected. Even in death, he deserves to have the last word.

References

1. Fraser, F.C. (2008). *Of mice and children: Reminiscences of a teratogeneticist*. *Am. J. Med. Genet. A.* 146A, 2179–2202.

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