

## IN MEMORIAM



### BrJAC pays Tribute to Full Professor Ronei J. Poppi (1961 – 2020)

Ronei Jesus Poppi  CV was born in a peripheral neighborhood in the city of Campinas (SP, Brazil), in a lower middle-class family – his father was the neighborhood barber; he spent his childhood and adolescence with several of his future colleagues at the University of Campinas (Unicamp).

In 1978, he started a technical course in Industrial Chemistry at the then Technical Industrial College “Conselheiro Antonio Prado” (Coticap, today ETECAP). Soon after completing technical education, he joined the Bachelor of Chemistry course at Unicamp having graduated in 1986 as one of the best in his class. He immediately started his Master’s degree, co-supervised by professors Fernando Faigle (already deceased) and Roy Bruns – who, in particular, would become a landmark scientific and personal reference for the then Master’s student. For his Doctorate, he joined the group of Prof. Célio Pasquini – at the time a group that was still being formed but which was already on the way to becoming one of the great centers of reference in analytical instrumentation in Brazil. In his Doctoral thesis (defended in July 1993), Ronei built a Hadamard Transform Spectrometer – a suggestion by the then postgraduate student and future colleague at the Institute of Chemistry at Unicamp (IQ-Unicamp) Pedro A.M. Vazquez (who collaborated in several stages of the system design). This work involved many stages from the construction of optical devices and high-level microcomputer programming to the development of multivariate data processing tools (a topic that had already been studied by Ronei in his Master’s thesis). Ronei’s enormous capacity and talent did not go unnoticed by the academy, and after a short period at the Federal University of Pernambuco (Recife, Brazil), he returned to Campinas and was admitted as a Professor in the Department of Analytical Chemistry at IQ-Unicamp, in 1994.

In the mid-1980s, the advent of relatively inexpensive microcomputers with much higher processing capacity than previously existing alternatives added to the demand from industry and academia for approaches that could provide very fast and reliable answers to problems in chemical and biochemical analysis. The experience and deep knowledge acquired by Ronei in his Master’s and Doctorate were decisive in showing him that his future as a researcher was in Chemometrics, a newly emerged area of research, which, at that time, was still viewed with some suspicion and prejudice by analytical chemists of traditional education. Therefore, even though he already had a solid base in Chemometrics, Ronei spent 1996 as a postdoctoral fellow with Professor Desiré Luc Massart’s group at the Free University of Brussels, Belgium – at the time, one of the greatest chemometricists in the world. After this internship, on his return to Unicamp, he actually started his activities as an independent researcher and soon established himself as a reference in Chemometrics in Brazil and the world. Ronei supervised more than sixty Master’s and Doctoral dissertations and theses and published 280 scientific articles – almost all of them dealing with cutting-edge developments and the application of several chemometric tools to relevant analytical problems in the chemical and pharmaceutical industry and in environmental and biochemical analyses. In many of them, relatively unexplored instrumental techniques were used: he was one of the pioneers in Brazil of Near Infrared Absorption Spectrometry (NIR), and more recently, in analytical Raman Spectroscopy and its variants. A more detailed examination of his scientific production shows that many of his works were the result of collaborations with colleagues at Unicamp and outside.

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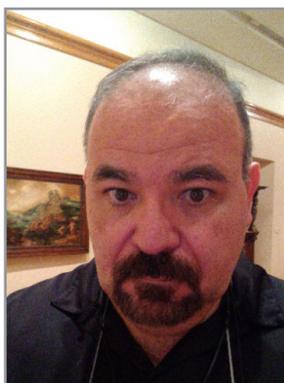
His enormous and inventive influence on research in Analytical Chemistry and Chemometrics in Brazil can be recognized by the fate of Master's and Doctoral students graduating from his research group: many of them are now important Professors and researchers at universities and public and private research centers throughout Brazil. Ronei was often requested as a lecturer and organizer of scientific meetings and events; rare was the week when he did not receive an invitation to act as a reviewer of manuscripts submitted to specialized journals and on thesis and examining boards both inside Unicamp and outside.

Ronei always conciliated his role as an international level researcher with his teaching and administrative activities at Unicamp. He never stopped actively collaborating in the various collegiate bodies that make up the administration of Unicamp (notably after his rise to the highest degree of an academic career, when he was approved for tender in the position of Full Professor, in 2013). He was also head of the Department of Analytical Chemistry at IQ-Unicamp on two occasions, and associate coordinator of the Post-Graduation in Chemistry Committee at that university. He was considered a talented and dedicated Professor by undergraduate and post-graduate students and was enormously respected (and liked, though he himself may never have realized it).

In his personal life, he was always a loyal, reserved and discreet colleague; in all aspects of his professional and personal life he acted impeccably ethically – even though it often failed to bring him any personal advantage (and on some occasions, just the opposite).

His dedication to teaching and research was unquestionable; however, he never became obsessed with research and showed extreme and sincere modesty. In particular, he always placed the well-being of his family (his wife, Ines, and his son, Pedro, as well as his parents) above all and he valued living with them like few others.

On April 25, 2020, Ronei Poppi suddenly left this world. The gap he left in Chemical Sciences in Brazil is only smaller than the gap that will be felt by his colleagues, friends, collaborators and students.



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