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Ana Isabel Palma Carlos Timberlake (1943–2009)



Ana Timberlake died on 17 December 2009 after a long fight with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. A kind and warm-hearted but also very strong and independent woman, she was the founder and chairman of Timberlake Consultants Limited (TCL), a firm specializing in statistical software and consultancy, with particular focus on medical research and econometric modeling applications.

Ana was born in Portugal, the daughter of a civil engineer. Her early childhood was on the Pego do Altar Dam construction site in the Alentejo, where her father, Armando da Palma Carlos, was the resident engineer. Her family were no strangers to strong women: her aunt Elina Guimarães has been described as the first feminist in Portugal.

Ana took her first degree in mathematics at Lisbon University before moving to Britain in 1969 to do a Master's degree in statistics at Southampton University. She was then employed at a small research unit in London, Planning and Transport Research and Computation (PTRC).

One of her early assignments at PTRC was a detailed analysis of the U.S. survey upon which the British breathalyzer test had been based. The original dataset consisted of 8,000 accident records and a further 8,000 controls. Early tabulations suggested that

driving behavior actually improved with the intake of a small amount of alcohol, which was contrary to all former laboratory research. However, after Ana had standardized the data for weather, vehicle age, driving experience, and so forth, it did become clear that there was a degradation in driving ability with alcohol intake.

While working at PTRC, Ana started upon a doctoral degree at Queen Mary College, London, under David Barton, into the use of mathematics by scientists and engineers. This research caused some consternation among certain professions when it showed that the level of mathematical sophistication generally employed by them barely exceeded that gained in a O-level mathematics course, as then attained by many 15- or 16-year-olds.

Ana then joined Control Data Corporation in London as a statistical consultant. Here she started to form her lifelong and worldwide associations with various academics, researchers, and developers of statistical techniques and software. This led Ana to form TCL in 1982 as a firm that specialized in bridging the gap between research and development and the application of statistics and modeling. She somehow managed to juggle her family life with successfully building her firm into a fully international business.

TCL's links with Stata are especially strong. Timberlake and its associate companies distribute Stata in the United Kingdom, Brazil, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. Ana had an impact on many Stata users by starting users meetings. The first was held in London in 1995 and annual meetings have been held there ever since. By the end of 2009, 53 meetings had been held worldwide, all of them following essentially the same mix of talks and tutorials as originally devised by Ana, and all ending with "Wishes and grumbles", Ana's happy phrase for a session devoted to user comments.

Ana will be very sadly missed, not only by family and friends but also by many in the wider statistical community who enjoyed their contacts and meetings with her. Those who knew her personally admired her dignity and courage as she battled over the last few years with a cruel condition.

Teresa Timberlake and Nicholas J. Cox