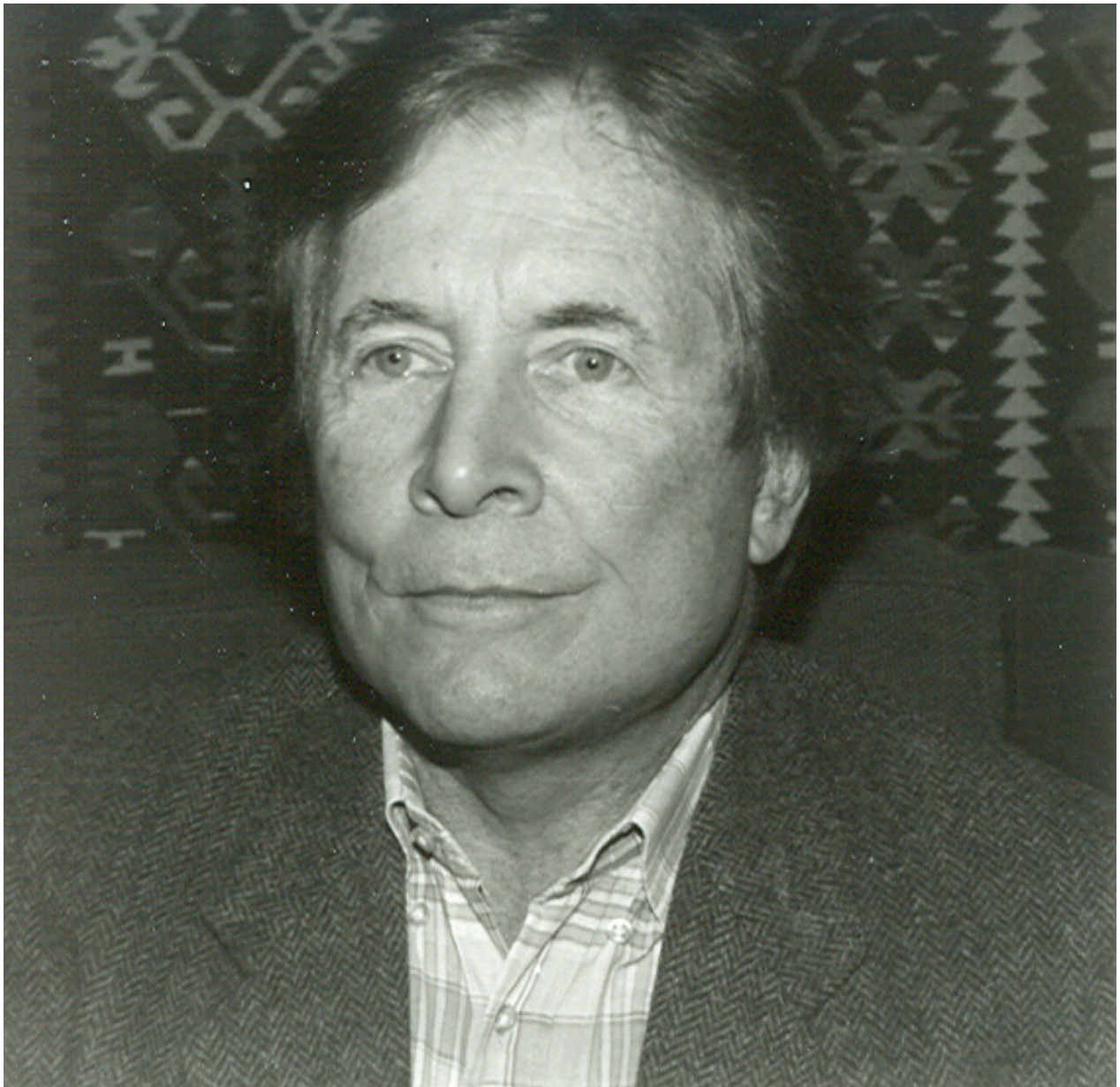


JOHN THOR ARNASON

George Hugh Neil Towers
1923-2004



Neil Towers, phytochemist, naturalist and ethnopharmacologist was Professor of Botany at the University of British Columbia (UBC). He was also for many years Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, from which he received the Flavelle Medal in 1986. He was awarded numerous other research prizes over his career. He was the recipient of the gold medal of the Canadian Society of Plant Physiologists in 1979 and was awarded the Pergamon Phytochemistry Prize in 2000. In 2001, Neil Towers was recognized by Institute for Scientific Information as one of the world's most highly cited scientists. He published more than 425 papers and book chapters, starting with a 1953 paper in *Nature*. His last major public engagement was the keynote banquet address at the joint conferences of the International Society for Chemical Ecology and the Phytochemical Society of North America in Ottawa, entitled "The role of natural products in natural history". Neil Towers was born in Burma (now Myanmar) where he grew in the tropical forest setting and developed a love of natural history. After serving in the Royal Indian Navy Volunteer Reserve, he was won an Ajax scholarship to study in Canada. He earned his BSc and MSc McGill University where he studied with phytochemist Darnley Gibbs. His PhD was obtained from Cornell University where he studied with the well known plant physiologist; F.C. Steward. Following academic appointments at McGill and the NRC in Halifax, he moved to UBC, where he was Head of the Department of Botany from 1964-1971. Thereafter he remained as professor of Botany and active researcher for the rest of his career.

The Towers laboratory made many major contributions to discovery and biological activity of natural products in plants, the discipline known as phytochemistry and chemical ecology. However, Neil Towers' research was always inspired by events in natural history or some aspect of indigenous knowledge. He directed scientific work on a fascinating array of topics including phototoxins from plants, hallucinogens from fungi, chemical defences of centipedes, insect antifeedants, antibacterial or antiviral substances, and traditional medicines from the Amazon, Borneo or Central America. As a pioneer in his field, Neil Towers was passionate about why plants produced biologically active substances, long before the field of Chemical Ecology was developed as a discipline.

Neil Towers was a man of great wit and intellect who inspired a large number of students and PDFs as well as visiting researchers from all parts of the world. He gave them the gift of enthusiasm for science and the natural world. Neil is survived by his wife Elizabeth and 8 children.

*John Thor Arnason
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(Author's title given as of the time of writing)