

Invited Editorial

The magic human 46 chromosomes were immortalised on a bronze plaque at Lund University in Sweden

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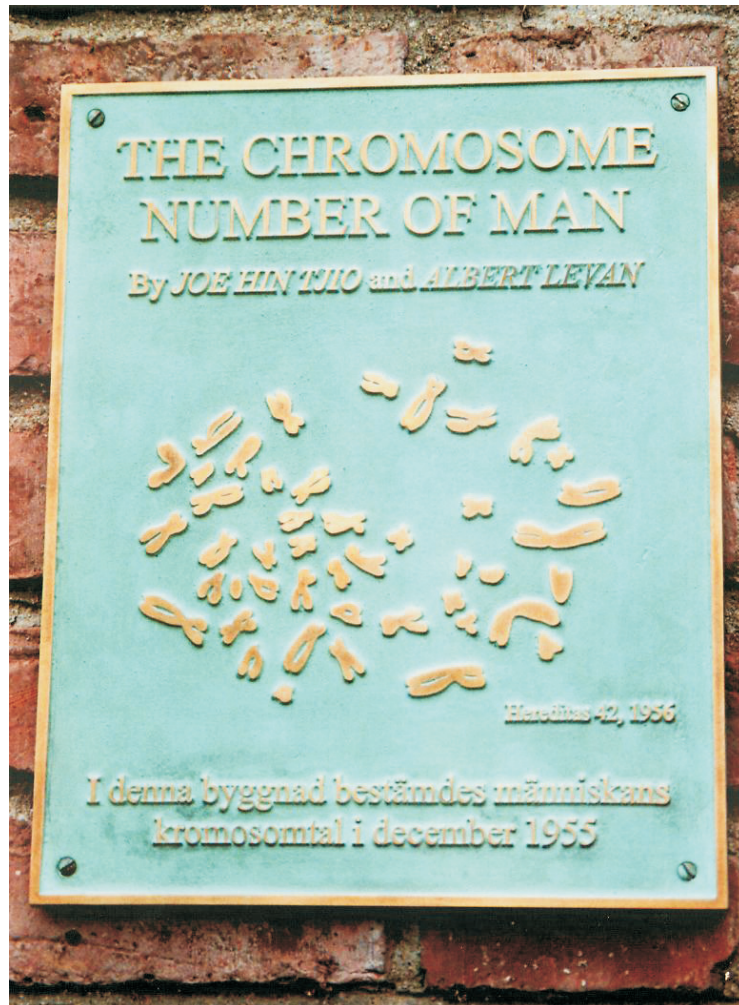
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The 9th of March 2003 was a day of glory in memory of Dr Joe Hin Tjio and Dr Albert Levan and their great discovery, made in December 1955, that normal human cells contain 46 chromosomes. On that day, on the right side of the front door of the Department of Genetics of Lund University, a small bronze plaque showing the normal human metaphase was unveiled by Cecilia Torudd and Dr Góran Levan, the children of Dr Albert Levan. Albert's widow, Karin Levan, had planned to unveil the memorial plaque, but she had to cancel this visit because she had celebrated her 100th birthday on the day before the ceremony. The metaphase on the plaque was copied from the first report by J. H. Tjio and A. Levan, entitled "The chromosome number of man", published in *Hereditas*, 42, 1-6, 1956. The plaque is simple and modest, with an excellent design (Figure). The subtitle informs all visitors that "In this building the chromosome number of man was determined in December 1955" (translation by Professor Nils Mandahl).

The ceremony was initiated, organised, and hosted by the Mendelian Society in Lund, especially by two members of this society: Professor Ulfur Arnason and the Chairman, Professor Bengt Olle Bengtsson. Many people participated in this moving ceremony, including many former students of Professor Levan, currently well-known geneticists, such as Professor Felix Mitelman, Head of the Department of Clinical Genetics, University of Lund.

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As a cytogeneticist with almost 40 years of experience, I greatly enjoyed my participation in this ceremony. I had the pleasure of meeting Professor Albert Levan personally in the early 1990s in Lund. I have two immediate recollections of him: firstly, he was a charming and warm person and, secondly, he was wearing a laboratory apron which was stained with colourful spots reflecting all the staining techniques used in cytogenetics. Among others, I recognised the purplish orcein stain, blue Giemsa stain, yellow quinacrine, black silver stain spots and other colours still to be discovered by future generations of cytogeneticists. And yet for me it was like a scientific clock measuring the time of an individual and also the time of human science, which cannot always be measured by astronomical clocks.