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The Life and Times of Ivar Asbjorn Folling

The region around the Baltic Sea has an abundance of history, but also many people that characterize it, with great breakthroughs in a variety of sciences, including medicine. Norway being an important part of this region, as it is shown by the relationships that have been formed and the continuous cooperation with Latvia and the rest of the Baltic States, takes great pride in being the homeland of one of the greatest scientist in experimental medicine of the 20th century. His name was Ivar Asbjorn Folling.

Asbjorn Folling was born on the 23rd of August 1888, in a village called Kvam, now part of Steinkjer. His family had a farm there and he spent the first years of his life in rural central Norway. After graduating from the Technical College of Norway in 1916, he moved to Oslo to study medicine. From there his life as a scientist begins. That was a life full of traveling around the world for research, many awards, but also hard work both as a professor and a researcher. But his greatest achievement came in 1934 when he discovered an unknown at the time disease that is now called phenylketonuria.

After this breakthrough more scientists wanted to work on this disorder. As a result we had the first successful treatment in 1950s by the German doctor Horst Bickel and the first diagnostic tests by the American microbiologist Robert Guthrie, in 1960s.

On the 21st century we know a lot more about Phenylketonuria (PKU), the genetics and the biochemical pathways behind the disease. Nowadays, most countries in the whole world have implemented programs in order to find people who are suffering from this disease and to successfully cope and deal with the symptoms, mainly of mental retardation.

This project, a result of bibliographic research, aims to combine information and materials that I was gratefully able to collect both from Norway and Greece in order to present some of the most important moments of the life and career of Asbjorn Folling. These moments are presented through visual materials some of them never before shown to the public.

It also aims to inform the scientific community about a disease which affects thousands of children around the world and it was the first example of how a genetic disorder can be the cause of mental retardation.

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