Retirement Is Just the Beginning for Former Anthropology Professor

With a sudden abundance of free time, the prospect of retirement often brings uncertainty for some. For former College of Liberal Arts anthropology professor, Jonathan Friedlaender, retirement has also brought a number of crowning career achievements.

Friedlaender, who now lives in Connecticut's rural Litchfield County, came to Temple in 1976 from Harvard. Since retiring almost four years ago, he and his wife Françoise, along with their colleagues at other universities, have published a number of important papers and a major book on Pacific genetics and anthropology. The most notable, entitled, "The genetic structure of Pacific Islanders," appeared last January in *PLoS-Genetics*, and was then covered by *The New York Times*, *Science*, *National Geographic* and dozens of newspapers around the world.

All of this is remarkable considering that Friedlaender took an early retirement at the age of 63 because he was diagnosed with an advanced case of melanoma. "There's no question that facing a very uncertain future and not having life spread out as an endless ocean in front of me made me focus on what I really wanted to accomplish in whatever time I had left," Friedlaender said. "It's been frightening, but it's also been an incredibly fulfilling time."

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The *Times* article was published January 18, the day of Friedlaender's last melanoma operation. "I went into the operating room knowing I had just had an interview the week before with the *Times* science writer," Friedlaender recalled. "And it was a real rush to have my surgeon wake me up, shake my hand and say, 'Congratulations! You've been written up this morning in *The New York Times!*'"
The New York Times article credited Friedlaender's genetic study, which examined over 700 DNA markers in approximately 1,000 Pacific islanders, with solving the puzzle of Polynesians' and Melanesians' ancestral relationships. Contrary to some recent suggestions that Polynesians are closely related to Melanesians from the New Guinea vicinity, Friedlaender's study showed Polynesians had virtually no genetic relationship to Melanesians, except for a very small genetic signature in certain Melanesian groups that also spoke languages related to Polynesian. The study also showed that Micronesians and Polynesians were most closely related to East Asians and especially Taiwan Aborigines. This is consistent with the idea that the ancestors of the Polynesians moved within a short time from the vicinity of Taiwan through Indonesia, New Guinea, and out into the uninhabited Pacific islands roughly 3,000 years ago.

His wife has played a major role in the recent series of articles and books. "It's been wonderful," Friedlaender said. "She has a doctorate in theoretical chemistry, and she worked at DuPont for most of her career. She's just a really good numbers person and computer analyst. This was all brand new to her, but she looked over my shoulder one day and said, 'I might be able to help you.'"

It turns out she did. Retirement, it seems, has proven to be a fruitful time for Friedlaender and his wife. "Even being under the gun with my health," he said, "these have been the most fulfilling years of my life."

Photos courtesy of the Department of Anthropology.