

**OBITUARY**

## **Professor emeritus Ferenc Zsoldos (1927-2012)**

In 2012 the Biology Institute of the University of Szeged is mourning again. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August in 2012 we lost our teacher of excellence, the 85 year old professor emeritus Ferenc Zsoldos.

Ferenc Zsoldos was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March in 1927 in Sarkad as child of the farmer Ferenc Zsoldos and Margit Nagy. He completed his elementary education in Sarkad-keresztúr between 1933 and 1939, higher elementary school and vocational school of trade between 1939 and 1947 in Sarkad and Békéscsaba. In 1948-1952 he attended the Faculty of Sciences of the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest and was awarded a biology and chemistry teachers' diploma in 1952. Until 1957 he was teaching as a professor's assistant in the Department of Plant Physiology and the Department of Applied Plant Biology in Budapest. In 1957 he became aspirant for Candidate's degree tutored by Dr Vilmos Frenyó. From that year he was employed as researcher of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at the newly founded Department of Plant Physiology in the University of Szeged. He received a teaching position in this department in 1963, became senior researcher in 1968 and associate professor in 1974. He was appointed professor in 1984. Between 1985 and 1995 he headed the Department of Plant Physiology, and became professor emeritus in 1996. After his retirement he continued to participate in the scientific and educational work of the department.

In 1958 he obtained the Candidate's degree and became Doctor of Life Sciences in 1983.

His wife Ildikó Jeremiás is a pharmacist. They raised two children, Gábor is a physician and Ildikó is a pharmacist. After them prof. Zsoldos had 4 grandchildren whom he loved very much and was always proud of them.

Beside his teaching tasks he did several other duties too, undertaking functions in many scientific associations. He served as the chief executive of the Biology Institute of the University of Szeged between 1988 and 1991. He was the secretary of the Subcommittee for Life Sciences, Theoretical Medicine and Pharmaceutics of the Academic Committee in Szeged (1967-1970), member of the Committee for Botany and Plant Physiology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1985-), the Hungarian Association of Plant Physiologists, and the Hungarian Association of Biologists (1953-). As for international scientific organizations, he was member of the Federation of European Societies of Plant Physiology, the European Society for New Methods in Agriculture and the Japan Prize Selection Committee.



He was editor (1980-1991) and later editor in chief (1992-1995) of the journal *Botanikai Közlemények*, editorial board member of the journal *Physiologia Plantarum* (1978-1992), *Oryza* (1985-1990) and the *Acta Biologica Szegediensis* (1984-1999).

In 2011 he mentioned in a commemorative volume on the biology education in Szeged that his scientific career was determined by rice research. Even as an elementary school student he spent his holidays at the experimental rice plantation of the Varsányhelyi Tiszauradalom in the outskirts of Sarkadkeresztúr. Here, he got acquainted with Ernő Obermayer and Ferenc Somorjai rice researchers from Szeged. Gábor Farkas' lectures on plant physiology intensified his interest in the life of plants. After his successful aspirant's project and his paper published in *Nature* he was invited to the laboratory of the Viennese International Atomic Energy Agency in Seibersdorf in 1962 where he investigated rice physiology till 1964. In those times virtually nobody from Hungary did scientific research abroad. In 1965 he launched the state-of-the-art isotope laboratory of the Department of Plant Physiology in Szeged and introduced isotope tracing in the investigation of plantal ion uptake that was later applied also in their educational routine.

His main research area was the mineral nutrition of plants, especially the biotic and abiotic stress effects (nitrite, aluminium, bioactive compounds, etc.) in cereals and also the occurrence nutritional deficiencies in plants. His research earned him a lot international attention and visits to foreign institutes. He worked in the German Democratic Republic in 1958 and 1968, in China and the USSR in 1960, in the Österreichische Forschungszentrum several times between 1973 and 1993, in

the Federal Republic of Germany in 1986 and 1992, in the US and Hawaii in 1979, in Italy and Belgium in 1993.

He published more than 200 papers in connection with his research topics in national and international scientific journals. He has been cited more than 400 times, his cumulative impact factor is around 120.

His research and educational work has been acknowledged with an Outstanding Work Achievement Decoration in 1987, Academic Award in 1992, Farkas Gábor Award in 2001, Jávorka Sándor Memorial Prize of the Hungarian Association of Biologists in 2006 and the Klebelsberg Kúnó Prize of the University of Szeged in 2007.

His main hobby was photography. It would be hard to find an event in the life of the university or science that Ferenc Zsoldos missed taking pictures of. His collection of thousands of photos may be a valuable resource for the history of science. These photos aided him in his teaching duties and help us to remember important events in science and the society. It would be useful to preserve them for posterity.

He loved Szeged. According to his own statement, Szeged provided the most tranquil working conditions and also his closer family rooted in the town. About his profession he once said plant biology always attracted him, but his real reason for becoming a biologist were his teachers.

The whole life of Ferenc Zsoldos was characterized by accuracy, precision and reliability. Things could not be ambiguous for him. People knew him as an even-tempered per-

sonality always living by the golden rule. His acquaintances and colleagues reputed him tolerant, patient, prudent, helpful and honest, who was standing on a clear moral base and appreciated friendship. During the decade of his leadership the Department of Plant Physiology was the island of peace. His consideration is well demonstrated by the fact that when he finished his thesis for the academic doctoral degree, he asked me if he could hand it in to the Academy of Sciences without his that time superior (only holding an Candidate's degree) bearing malice towards him. When I finished my manuscript on the biology education in Szeged where I also mentioned him, he checked it several times so that nobody would be left out who he worked with.

We have lost Ferenc Zsoldos. May he rest in peace and his memory be cherished by his students and colleagues with such love and respect as he loved and respected them.

### **Further information on the life of Ferenc Zsoldos**

- Farkas L. Gyula: *Biológia*. In: Ráczné Mojzes Katalin (ed.): 90 éves a szegedi természettudományi képzés. Szeged, 2011. p. 32.
- Havasi Zoltán (ed.): *Szegedi Egyetemi Almanach, 1921-1970*.
- Hermann Péter (ed.): *Magyar és nemzetközi ki-kicsoda*, 1996, p. 1079.
- Kasza Sándor (ed.): *Magyarország megyei kézikönyvei. Csongrád megye kézikönyve 5*, Ceba Kiadó, 1997, p. 566.
- Szentirmai László-Iványi Szabó Éva- Ráczné Mojzes Katalin (eds.): *Szegedi Egyetemi Almanach 1921-1995*, p. 463.
- Szluka Emil (ed.): *Természettudományos és műszaki ki-kicsoda*, 1988, Budapest, p. 400.