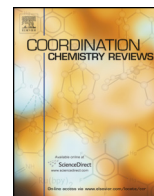




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Celebration of inorganic lives: Henryk Kozlowski – More about the man than his science

Elżbieta Gumienna-Kontecka*

Faculty of Chemistry, University of Wrocław, F. Joliot-Curie 14, 50-383 Wrocław, Poland

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On September 1st, 2015, friends, colleagues and co-workers, from Poland and abroad, gathered in Karpacz, Poland at the XIII International Conference on Inorganic Biochemistry, to honor Prof. Henryk Kozlowski as scientist, teacher and mentor, and friend. This Special issue of CCR is an additional token of our appreciation of a truly outstanding chemist – Professor Henryk Kozlowski.

EGK: Henryk, Professor Henryk Kozlowski, it's my great pleasure to congratulate you once more on this special occasion – your 70th birth anniversary and special issue of CCR.

Henryk, I would like to start the interview from a non-conventional question. Imagine you go to a conference and you are about to book a hotel. You have the possibility to choose from – a 5, where the prominent speakers will most probably stay, and another one, a much cheaper 3*, where most probably the young generation of scientist will stay. Which one would you choose and why?*

HK: Oh, 3. Because most of the famous prominent speakers might turn out to be quite boring and the young generation is really enjoying life, and discussions with them could be much more exciting. They don't talk only about science, but also about many other things which I like and enjoy.*

EGK: You are very modest. Is this the way you were raised by your parents? Tell us few words about them, about the family, your childhood.

HK: I am the oldest son, and I have two sisters and a brother. I am the fruit of love in a work camp in Germany. My parents came back to Poland after the war and stopped in the north of Poland (Warszkówko) where I was born. As I am the oldest in the family, I had many duties. It was just after the war, so life was not very easy, we were poor. For political reasons, we had to move from the north of Poland to a city in a middle west (Żagań). My primary school in this city was very good, and the secondary school was really fantastic. We had many great teachers. I remember my chemistry teacher very well – he induced my 'chemical life', and I think it was because of him that I decided to study chemistry. The reason was very simple. In those days, in order to be able to study at the University, one had to pass entrance exams. My teacher, professor Jurga, encouraged me to take part in a High School Chemistry Olympiad. I won, and because of that, I was able to study at the University without entry exams. This was a very important thing, to get to the University without exams. I could have also chosen medicine, but medicine seemed to be too hard for me, so I chose chemistry. So maybe I was not modest but lazy, I was just following the flow of things the way they happened.

EGK: Were your parents imagining you as a scientist or maybe they were thinking of another profession?

HK: My parents were very happy because I was good in mathematics, physics and chemistry; in history, I was not bad, but worse, and my Polish was even worse than my history knowledge. The dream of my parents was that I will finish University. Of course they wanted me to become a medical doctor, as all parents do, but when I decided to study chemistry, that was fine with them, my parents accepted that.

* Tel.: +48 71 3757347.

E-mail address: elzbieta.gumienna-kontecka@chem.uni.wroc.pl

EGK: As an undergraduate and graduate student – what do you remember from the very beginning, from your first days as a student?

HK: That was very interesting. When I started to study chemistry at the University of Wrocław, there were not so many students at that time. We were about 30 or so. Still, we were divided into two groups, according to the entry exam notes, and I was among the best students. Of course the target was that those two groups would be joined at the second year, after leveling out their background. Regarding the better students, the teachers usually expected more from us than from the others. Then, because I was a winner of the Chemistry Olympiad, everybody expected that I already knew chemistry at the first year. If I had any problems with something, all the students from my year knew that I made some mistake. That was very hard. I remember one thing very, very well. We had a kind of colloquia, I mean small exams on the solutions of chemical problems. Notes were from 2 to 5, and I got a note that was below 4. It was a big disappointment for my mates. That was not very easy for me; I was 'forced' to behave very well and learn more than others. But in the long run, that was not bad for me.

EGK: Along your studies, did you meet unique professors?

HK: I was very lucky because already at the first year we had very close contacts with some teachers. I remember Professor Bogusława Jeżowska-Trzebiatowska (BJT), who was later my supervisor. She came to one of the very first lectures and talked to all of the students. She was told by other lecturers that I was the winner of the Chemistry Olympiad at a national level. So when she approached me, she asked 'Oh, you know everything, so I'll give you a question'. I remember that question very well: 'How to detect iron (III) in a given sample?' Wow. Fortunately, I knew the answer, so I was very happy. The question was very simple, if one knew how to make analysis, and this was usually not the case during the first year of chemistry. Because of my participation in the famous Olympiad I had to know how to analyze some specific chemicals, including metal ions. And then I didn't really interact with Prof. Trzebiatowska until my last year.

Our next direct contact which I remember, was a conversation after my master exam, devoted to theoretical calculations (without the use of computers, and only tables of overlapping integrals); when the committee told me that I was a Master of Chemistry, Professor BJT asked: 'Would you like to work in my group?' To be honest, I was both surprised and amazed, because until then, I had not planned what to do after graduating from the University (as I've said I was a lazy man, really). This is how my cooperation with Professor BJT began.



Picture 1. Dr. Henryk Kozłowski receiving his PhD diploma from Prof. Bogusława Jeżowska-Trzebiatowska.

EGK: In 1974 you moved to Japan for a post-doc. Why University of Tokyo?

HK: I did my PhD thesis in 4 years and then, again a coincidence – Prof. BJT came back from Japan and asked me 'Would you like to go to Japan as a post-doc?' Most of my colleagues planned to go to USA those days, but Japan was quite an exotic country, so I decided to go there. I am really happy till now that I did so. Tokyo University was the most famous University in Japan (they were the first ones in Japan to have a computer). I cannot say if it was the best chemistry Department in Japan, maybe Nagoya was better at that time, but still, it was very good. I remember a very specific way of working; the University was in the center of Tokyo, in a very old building, with very limited space. Before going there, I didn't really understand what limited space means. It was really very crowded everywhere. But working at the University of Tokyo was so prestigious, that there were a lot of candidates willing to work as postdocs, PhD students, students. I was given a very good training. Also the culture was completely different to the European one; it was really an excellent stay.

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