

## Professor Kroata Hazler Pilepić (1968–2017)



Professor Kroata Hazler Pilepić, PhD, a Croatian scientist and full professor employed at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb, died on September 1, 2017.

Kroata was born on November 23, 1968 in Zagreb (Croatia), where she finished elementary school, music school (piano) and high school (pharmacy technician). In 1992 she finished the graduate course of pharmacy at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb. She gained her master's degree from the postgraduate school of natural sciences (field: biology – molecular and cell biology) at the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb in 1997. In 2003, she gained her doctoral degree from the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. From 1992 to 2004 she worked as an assistant at the Department of Pharmaceutical Botany at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb, after which she was appointed senior research assistant (2004), assistant professor (2007), associate professor (2011) and full professor (2017) at the same Department.

She participated in teaching the graduate courses Pharmaceutical Botany (1992–2017) and Cell Biology with Genetics (1992–1998, 2013) at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb, Croatia, and furthermore, the graduate course Pharmaceutical Botany at the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, University of Split, Croatia (2004–2006) and the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012). Finally, she taught the graduate course Medicinal Plants at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Zagreb, Croatia (2007–2017). She was author and co-author of two chapters in a university textbook, author of two pharmaceutical botany handbooks and a mentor of 85 graduate students and one doctoral student.

Kroata's scientific interests included plant population genetics, molecular phylogeny and systematics, functional genomics, plant biochemistry, morpho-anatomical characteristics of plants, secondary plant metabolites and their biological effects. She was particularly interested in species from the genus *Hypericum* L. During her master's studies, through intensive field work, under the supervision of Professor Ivan Šugar from the Department of Pharmaceutical

Botany, Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb, she gained a vast knowledge of botany and phytocoenology and expanded her knowledge of morpho-anatomical plant characteristics, plant physiology, secondary metabolites and their biological effects. She received additional scientific training at the Department of Plant Ecology, University of Bordeaux I, Talence, France during 1995 and 1996, where she perfected her botanical knowledge, application of isoenzymes as molecular markers and methods of plant population genetics. She had further training in plant biology, molecular phylogeny and plant systematics at the Division of Molecular Biology of the Ruđer Bošković Institute in Zagreb, where she conducted research for her doctoral thesis. The latter was largely financed by funds from her project for young researchers, funded by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia. Afterwards, she continued her scientific development in functional genomics and plant biochemistry, working on a project of Professor Hrvoje Fulgosi at the Laboratory for Electron Microscopy of the Ruđer Bošković Institute. She herself was also the head of five projects funded by the University of Zagreb and one project funded by the Foundation of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and was an associate on five projects funded by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, as well as on the Croatian-French scientific program of integral actions called Cogito. She published 36 scientific papers and participated with oral and/or poster presentations in about 40 scientific meetings and was a member of the organisation committee of the 1<sup>st</sup> Croatian Congress on Molecular Life Sciences. She was also a co-author of one professional book and author and co-author of several professional papers and popular science articles. Moreover, she gave many professional lectures and workshops and was the creator of two interactive exhibitions that popularize science.

She was a member (1992–2017) and a vice president (2001–2008) of the Croatian Society of Plant Biology, as well as a member of the Federation of European Societies of Plant Biology (1992–2017), Croatian Genetic Society (1995–2017), *Iris croatica* Society (2004–2017) and Croatian Botanical Society (2009–2017). She was also a member of the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Commission at the Croatian Chamber of Pharmacists (2015–2017). At the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry she held the following positions: member of the Education Committee



Prof. Kroata Hazler Pilepić (right) and Maja Friščić, PhD (left), during fieldwork in 2012. The photo was taken by Kroata's husband, associate professor Viktor Pilepić from the Department of Physical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb.

(2010–2014), president of the Student Papers and Awards Committee (2015–2016), member of the Awards and Honours Committee (2016) and member of the Student Papers and Awards Committee (2016–2017).

Having almost 25 years of teaching experience, Kroata was one of the most beloved teachers at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, valued and respected by her students, with whom she nurtured a caring relationship. Most of the students knew her as an excellent professor, full of love and enthusiasm for the plant world, one who enjoyed teaching and knew how to spark an interest in those who were not plant lovers in the beginning. In teaching, she tended to be always positive and full of understanding and was very respectful to all living beings; plants, animals and people alike. The recognition and appreciation of her work as an educator by students and colleagues were also confirmed through the awards she received: the highest grade for an assistant in the academic year 2005/2006 (according to the university student survey), and the Award of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb for exceptional achievements in student education in the academic year 2013/2014.

Apart from genuinely enjoying working with students, Kroata had a great curiosity for science as well. However, she tended to be more cautious and realistic in her research. Her colleagues knew her as a hard-working, persistent, responsible and conscientious person, who was also unpretentious and modest. She was a patient and encouraging mentor, always ready to help and give useful advice, not just in terms of work and experimental planning, but also in terms of human relations and life in general. I thought of her as a truly warm, motivating, creative and honest person. I am so grateful that, as my PhD mentor, she was open to new ideas and was always ready to encourage my independence in work, while at the same time being very supportive in all my activities, including going to education events, experiencing international stays, applying for projects or competing for awards. More importantly, she was a loving wife and caring mother of two children, of whose achievements, abilities and sense of responsibility she was very proud.

I would also like to mention and appreciate some of the small things that made her happy, like baking cakes, gardening, traveling, sailing, ballooning, dancing, enjoying pleasant aromas and finding pleasure in small aesthetic details. We spent a lot of time together, frequently collaborating on a daily basis and occasionally presenting research at congresses or engaging in fieldwork. I had the privilege of learning from her as both her graduate and postgraduate student, through talking and discussing, as well as through sharing new ideas for the future. We were both looking forward to the continuation of our co-operation, both in science and in class, and planning new projects for the years to come.

Although she passed away so suddenly, with years of her greatest scientific achievements, creations and personal challenges still before her, leaving us all in pain and disbelief, she has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on all who knew her. While her scientific work will certainly be continued, her contributions to the education of thousands of students and to community in general encourage us to be better people and the best possible in everything we do, until the day we see her again, picking her favourite flowers in the eternal fields.

Maja Friščić, PhD

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