



**Professor Bożenna Zawirska, MD, Ph.D.
30.06.1923-8.02.1987**

It is not difficult to find out what kind of a scientist the late Professor Zawirska was, but is it easy to learn what kind of a human being she was?

It was in 1976, I was exiting the room of Professor Zygmunt Albert, having sat my first degree board examination in pathomorphology, when I was stopped by Professor Zawirska, who asked me whether I was planning to continue pursuing the specialty. When I confirmed my willingness, I was told Professor Zawirska would be my supervisor in further postgraduate training. The news made me go all weak in the knees. Why? At that time, Professor Zawirska was perceived by us, then the young assistants, as an extremely hard-faced, unapproachable and demanding person. One could not have been more in error.... After a short period, it turned out that only the last adjective was correct. Not much time later, I could see for myself that nothing better than Professor Zawirska's mentorship could have happened to me. What kind of a human being she really was – this truth is known only to those nearest and dearest to her and to us – her disciples. Many of us owe to Professor Zawirska everything we have managed to achieve in our professional and non-professional lives.

I am positive I am expressing the opinion shared by all of her disciples when I write that she was like a mother to us. On some occasion I wrote that I believed myself to be a happy man, since I had four parents

– two biological and two professional ones. My professional father was the late Associate Professor Henryk Starzyk, and my professional mother – Professor Zawirska. My grief on her demise was the more painful as three months earlier, my Mother had died – hence, having lost them both, I felt a sense of utter emptiness.

Professor Bożenna Zawirska came from the Eastern borderlands; she was born in Zbaraż on June 30, 1923. Her father Hipolit, an alumnus of the John Casimir University in Lvov, was a specialist in Polish studies, a defender of Lvov in 1918, and a Siberian exile.

Having completed her secondary education in Lvov in 1944, Professor Zawirska arrived in Wrocław, where she was in the first post-war class to receive the diploma of physician in 1951. While still a student, in 1949, she became a volunteer worker at the Chair of Pathological Anatomy, at that time headed by Professor Zygmunt Albert. In 1955, she was board certified as first degree specialist, and in 1958, as second degree specialist in pathomorphology. In 1956, she was conferred the title of doctor of medical sciences, and in 1964, assistant professor. In 1977, she became associate professor, and in 1987 – full professor.

For 57 years, Professor Zawirska was employed at the Chair of Pathological Anatomy. Having retired, she continued to offer us her priceless help and share

her knowledge on a daily basis; she would visit us at the Department every day as late at the beginning of last year. Even after a short period of convalescence following a serious operation, she visited us as often as she could.

Today, we no longer can approach her saying, „Madam Professor, I have a problem... Could you, please, help me?” Although, she may possibly be still looking after us and helping us, who knows?

The late Professor Zawirska headed the Chair and Department of Pathological Anatomy in the most difficult period at the turn of the 1970's and 1980's, when martial law was imposed in Poland. In those hard days, especially under martial law, we could best feel and appreciate her assistance and care. Professor Zawirska was a World War II veteran, and – if being a veteran of martial law is possible at all – she undoubtedly was that, too.

Professor Bożenna Zawirska was an eminent scientist, the author of numerous research papers and a fellow in numerous foreign institutions. She held several important offices at the University, received many awards and distinctions for her research activities and her work on behalf of the University.

She tutored many generations of students and physicians and supervised almost twenty doctoral and post-doctoral dissertations. Professor Zawirska was an eminent teacher, a true friend to students, a humanist and an ardent patriot.

Madam Professor had many extraprofessional interests. History was her true passion, especially the Napoleonic period. Oftentimes, this passion for history led us to developing complexes due to questions she used to ask us, to which we usually were unable to find any answers.

Her other extraprofessional passion was art (her collection, mostly of watercolor paintings, is owned by her family; several works now belong to the author of the present obituary). Professor Zawirska loved solitary mountain trekking and contact with Nature – above all with birds. She could never abide human misery and injustice and this is why for many years, she donated funds to the Home for Blind Children at Laski near Warsaw.

She left behind a room full of books, figurines and pictures of birds and youthful visions of a different, just world. She also left behind her University cap, now passed on to her family; the cap was for her the symbol of the Wrocław University and the academic values.

The love of her autumn days was Brzeżany, „the town of my not-lost childhood”, as she used to say. The book about Brzeżany she planned to publish opens with the motto from „Przedwiośnie” by Stefan Żeromski: „Everybody has a favorite place from childhood. This is the home country of the soul”.

Professor Michał Jeleń