

Dr. Maria Klimczyk-Janikowska
1924–2000



Maria Klimczyk was born in Cracow on 18 March 1924 to Jan Klimczyk, a teacher at a secondary school at Wieliczka, (previously at Wadowice), and Józefa née Pietrzykowska. Jan Klimczyk prepared Karol Wojtyła, the present Pope John Paul II, for his School Certificate examination, at Wadowice. Maria Klimczyk left primary school in Wieliczka in 1937 and began to attend the Józef Joteyko Secondary School in Cracow. By the outbreak of World War II, she had completed the second form. During the German occupation in 1942 she graduated from a commercial school for Poles, and took a job at the Bank of Issue in Cracow. In June 1943 she joined the underground Home Army A.K. and was a liaison officer between the diversionary group "Wacław" and the partisan detachment "Szczerbiec". In July 1944 she was detached to an underground press section where she participated in printing the paper "Kurier Narodowy" (Courier of the Nation).

On 30 September 1944 Maria Klimczyk was arrested in a contact apartment which was betrayed. She had been aware of the treachery but intentionally did not escape in order to protect her family. At that time the collective penalty practised by the Nazi authorities was well known. Maria Klimczyk believed that if she allowed herself to be arrested, her parents and her four siblings would not be taken to the concentration camp. After a short interrogation (repeated four times) at the

Gestapo premises at Pomorska Street in Cracow, she was sent to the concentration camp at Buchenwald in November 1944 and then in 1945 transferred to the extermination camp for women at Ravensbrück at Meklemburg.

Set free by the Soviet Army on 6 May 1945, she returned to Poland on foot with a group of Polish women prisoners. During that return, suffering from starvation, they were reduced to feeding on grass. They had to avoid both settlements and military troops which were carrying out group rapes. Maria Klimczyk was fortunate enough to be rescued from such a fate by Polish miners in Silesia. When she reached home in Wieliczka it became evident that the sojourn in the camps and long walk home had weakened her severely and she had developed serious TB. She was therefore sent to Zakopane, where she finally recovered. Maria Klimczyk then moved to Jelenia Góra, where she obtained a job as an office worker and began her secondary education for adults. In 1948 she returned to Wieliczka, and having obtained her School Certificate, began university studies in biology at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. She graduated as master of science in December 1952 on the basis of the thesis "The ability of water turtles to discriminate between numbers", which was well appreciated and published.

On 15 July 1953 Maria Klimczyk started to work in the newly organized Laboratory of Fish Pond Biology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow, whose founder was Professor Karol Starmach. Thus, she was a member of the initial staff of this institute where she continued to work until retirement in April 1984. In 1967 during her time there she had married a colleague from the Laboratory. During the first years of her scientific activity Maria Klimczyk investigated zooplankton communities in fish ponds. These investigations pertained to research on the methods of increase in fish production by the mineral fertilization of ponds. One of the tasks was to generate maximum development of zooplankton as food for cultured fish. The obtained results were presented in ten papers. However, her very promising studies on zooplankton were abandoned because of the fear of blindness owing to loss of health as a result of her war experiences. Maria Klimczyk was forced to stop working with a microscope. Therefore, from 1959 she changed her specialization to ichthyology.

During the rest of her professional career Maria Klimczyk carried out research on several aspects of fish biology. Initially she was engaged in the investigation of fish breeding and genetics at the experimental station at Golysz in the region of Cieszyn, Silesia. She then took the opportunity of joining the research on ichthyofauna composition in the rivers of southern Poland. Within this project she studied a number of species. Her investigations comprised distribution ranges, the composition of fish communities in rivers and dam reservoirs, biometrics, growth rate, and food composition. She published the results of these studies in fifteen papers, one of which, "Chub, *Leuciscus cephalus* (L.) of the Upper Vistula, Sola and San rivers" was accepted as her PhD thesis. The Department of Natural History Sciences of the Jagiellonian University awarded her the PhD of natural sciences doctoral degree in June 1964. One of her remarkable achievements was the elaboration of the food of silver carp, *Hypophthalmichthys molitrix* (Val.) in the heated waters of the Rybnik Reservoir in Upper Silesia. Eighteen other reports of research carried out in this reservoir remained only as typescripts. In 1967 Dr. Maria Klimczyk-Janikowska was invited by Helsinki University to Finland for study of the minnow, *Phoxinus phoxinus* (L.). In May 1968 She was nominated as permanent lecturer at the Institute of Freshwater Biology. Another important collective research project in which she took part were the international investigations on common bream, *Abramis brama* (L.) and vimba, *Vimba vimba* (L.)

initiated by the Institute of Biology in Vilnius (Lithuania). She contributed to the publishing of ten papers presenting the results of that project.

Dr. Maria Klimczyk-Janikowska was an outstanding teamworker, always friendly and helpful, hardworking in field, unstinting and persistent in her efforts, supportive to others. By virtue of her merits she was held in high esteem in those dreary and hostile times, full of propagated hatred of man to man. From the very beginning she was a member of the Cracow Branch of the Polish Hydrobiological Society. From 1973 She was a member of the organization of veterans "ZBoWiD" and from 1981 a member of the trade union "Solidarność" (Solidarity). She was awarded the Victory and Freedom Medal only in 1976.

Dr. Maria Klimczyk-Janikowska died suddenly in Cracow, during her fourth heart attack, on 23 November 2000. She was buried in her mother's tomb in Salwator Cemetery. She was one of those so numerous brave Polish women, sincere patriots "small heroes", who in the most terrible times of World War II had offered their lives for the sake of the motherland. Her memory will always remain with us.

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