

## Jan Romuald Zdysiewicz, FRACI (1943-2010)\*

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Jan Zdysiewicz, known to most of us as John Z, former Managing Editor of the *Australian Journal of Chemistry*, died in the Royal Melbourne Hospital on 10 March 2010, followed by family burial in Adelaide.

John was born in Laukischken, East Prussia, on 12 April 1943. His parents were Polish, from Mosty, near Lwow, now part of Ukraine. They had been taken to Germany as forced labour during World War II two months prior to John's birth. For several years after the war, they were shifted from camp to camp as displaced persons. Eventually they were accepted for migration to Australia, and the family arrived by ship at Port Melbourne in December 1950. More camp dwelling followed, including time spent at the large immigration centre at Bonegilla, until they were able to settle in Adelaide. John attended Adelaide Boys High School and in 1962 became an Australian citizen. As a child, he was interested in photography and sport, and he displayed a great fondness and talent for music.

By 1965 John had completed BSc (Hons.) in physical and inorganic chemistry at the University of Adelaide, gaining a First. He continued there on to the PhD, which he completed in 1968, under the supervision of Tom Kurucsev. Then followed postdoctoral work at the University of Lancaster, where he was a Leverhulme Visiting Fellow. In 1970, he came to Melbourne as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the CSIRO Division of Protein Chemistry. For his final postdoctoral appointment, he went abroad again in 1973, to the University of Western Ontario. Up to that point his research was broadening with each successive appointment, and he published several papers in the primary chemical literature. His interests included work on oriented DNA films, ESR studies on radical anions, interaction of fluorescent whitening agents with wool components, and photochemical reactions involving radical ions. In 1974 he married Joan; there were no children.

In 1975 John made a change that was to dominate the second half of his life. He moved into scientific publishing to another part of CSIRO, as Assistant Editor of the *Australian Journal of Chemistry*, where he was mentored by Bob Schoenfeld. As strong, independent folk, Bob and John had very different personalities but they shared great respect, the one for the other. They had other things in common, too. Against the odds, both succeeded professionally despite having their early lives blighted by wartime disruption; and each in succession could be considered to have become the Australian arbiter in matters of good chemical communication, possessing enviable skill in English, despite not having English as his first language. When Bob retired in 1985, John became Managing



John Z in his office at CSIRO PUBLISHING, 1998.

Editor of the *Journal*, where he remained until his retirement at the end of 2000.

As Managing Editor over a timeframe when scientific publishing saw many technological changes, John was very much hands-on. He brought meticulous accuracy to every aspect of the editorial process and took creative pride doing so. But he was also a very visible participant in the corporate life of Australian chemistry, known widely, never losing an opportunity to engage with established authors and referees or to drum up new ones, giving and sponsoring lectures, visiting departments, attending conferences, and awarding prizes, particularly as a means of encouraging student participation.

John's exceptional patience for his work, and the respect he showed to members of the chemical community, earned him much admiration from his colleagues. He was a scrupulous and supportive mentor, and placed equal value on both a solid work ethic and the necessity to treat people with great respect. He demonstrated particular kindness and encouragement to students and young scientists at the beginning of their careers. Those lucky enough to be invited will never forget the outstanding Christmas lunches that he hosted at the Macedonian Restaurant. Many will remember his booming laugh that punctuated refreshment sessions after lectures and symposia.

John was a member of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute for 40 years, becoming a Fellow in 1994. In 1998 he was awarded an Institute Citation for his contribu-

tion to the promotion of Australian chemistry nationally and internationally. From 1987 to 1997 he served on the IUPAC Commission III 2 (on Physical Organic Chemistry), first as a National Representative and then as an Associate Member. Outside of chemistry, he possessed one particular talent, of which he rarely spoke. He was a first-rate accordion player (in 1961 he was Grand Australian Accordion Champion), something that, in later years, those of us who were privileged to hear him in action could vouch for. In retirement, he was set to take satisfaction honing this skill. Sadly, the onset of debilitating illness allowed him little opportunity to do so.

John was a shy person but one who possessed sharp intellect, broad knowledge, and strong views. His professional life revolved around the *Australian Journal of Chemistry*, maintaining its editorial standards and integrity at exceptionally high level. Relaxing with his many

friends, though, he was socially ebullient, great company, and extraordinarily generous. He was an outstanding human being, and a true friend. Early in 2006 he successfully underwent surgery for prostate cancer. But that was followed by severe symptoms of Parkinson's disease that greatly impeded the remainder of his life. During that time, in and out of hospital, he was helped by his younger sister, Janina. At the end, he never regained consciousness following a cardiac arrest at home, and he died a few days later. We deeply regret his passing.

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