Klaus Burger – Obituary

9. 7. 1938-26. 5. 2016

Professor Klaus Burger, our mentor, dear friend and colleague passed away on May 26, 2016, just a few weeks before he would have celebrated his 78th birthday. He had been widowered by the passing of his beloved wife, Catja, and is survived by their son Julian. Julian's love, the support that his family gave, and his passion for chemistry helped him to fight the devastating illness he suffered from during the final years of his life.

This gifted scientist studied Chemistry at the Technical University in Munich and completed his PhD in 1965 with Prof. Dr. F. Weygand. After a postdoctoral stay in the lab of Professor R. N. Hazeldine in Manchester, England (1967−1968) he returned to Munich and began his habilitation with Professor Weygand, subsequent to which he was promoted to Associate Professor (Extraordinarius). Excited by the political changes in Germany in 1989, he accepted a call for a full professorship from University Leipzig in 1993.

His interest in fluorine chemistry was sparked during his PhD period with Friedrich Weygand and through his intensive, dedicated, and outstanding work he became an internationally renowned fluorine chemist.
The primary focus of his work was forging a connection between organic fluorine chemistry and the chemistry of heterocycles, amino acids, peptides and carbohydrates.

The results of his comprehensive work are documented in more than 400 publications, and more than 170 of these were written during his time in Leipzig.
He significantly contributed to the excellent reputation that this university enjoys in organic chemistry, e.g. by his extraordinary publication activity and his participation in the DFG-Innovationskolleg: “Chemical signal and biological response”. Furthermore, he acquired funding from the DFG, the EU, and also for many other third-party projects. He was a member of the Max-Bergmann-Kreis and of the Editorial Boards of several scientific journals. His activities also included several national and international collaborations, among others with research groups in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, England, Italy, France, Switzerland, and the USA.
He was also a highly accomplished and inspiring educator, teaching in numerous areas of organic chemistry. In addition to research-based instruction and his diverse lectures, as well as the many internships and doctoral theses he supervised, the training of laboratory technicians and the supervision of foreign trainees always counted equally to his scientific and teaching achievements. During his tenure at Leipzig University, two assistant professors, more than 25 PhD students, and many diploma students completed their work.
Klaus Burger officially retired in 2003. However, he did not stop his scientific activities until 2008. For all his contributions, he received the appreciation and respect of the fluorine chemistry community. Most importantly, he was more than a respected colleague and teacher, especially for us.

Beate Koksch: Dear Klaus, I first got to know you when I visited your lab at Technical University Munich as a PhD student of Professor Hans-Dieter Jakubke (Leipzig) in 1992. I was funded by a joint grant between Professor Jakubke and yourself, one of the first DFG grants that supported East-German research groups collaborating with research groups from West-Germany, and I learned from your PhD students how to synthesize fluorinated amino acids. From day one I felt inspired by the scientific atmosphere in your laboratory and especially by your hospitality. We quickly joined forces, realizing the synergy that could be achieved with your numerous ideas regarding the synthesis of new fluorinated building blocks and my ideas of their use in peptide modification. Therefore, I returned to your laboratory soon after my initial stay and remained for

almost one year. I will always remember you as the energetic, kind, and always motivational professor who became a treasured colleague and friend. Without your encouragement I would, most likely, not be a university professor today and your guidance helped me to become a member of the fluorine chemistry community, for which I am very grateful. Thank you Klaus for giving me the opportunity to become part of your scientific family and for all our philosophical exchanges.

Norbert Sewald: I joined Klaus' group during my undergraduate studies and my first scientific publication was the result of a research internship in 1986. Even at that time as a student I was always impressed by the scientific atmosphere in the group, by the scientific quality, by Klaus' scientific enthusiasm and by the enormous self-motivation of the group members. Having joined the group (aka "Burger family") for my diploma thesis and PhD, I dived into organofluorine chemistry, met interesting national and international scientists, and learnt how to successfully write publications and grant proposals. After my postdoc with Jack Baldwin I was excited to move with Klaus and the group from Munich to Leipzig in 1993/1994, where I was able to start my own scientific career. There, the research attitude of Klaus and his group mixed with the possibilities of a new environment to create a vibrant hands-on research atmosphere. Although my research interests have moved on since then, I will always remember it.
Klaus, you will remain a role model for me when it comes to motivating young people and encouraging them to find their own scientific footpaths. Thank you for having been mentor and friend!

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