

SYMPOSIUM

In memory of Professor Béla Matkovics on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his birth

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On September 27-28, 2002, the Hungarian Free Radical Research Society, the Csongrád County Group of the Association of Hungarian Chemists, and the University of Szeged held a joint scientific meeting in the House of Technology in Szeged. With the scientific programme entitled "Free Radical Research 2002" we paid tribute to the memory of Professor Béla Matkovics on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his birth.

Béla Matkovics was born on 12 July, 1927 in the Hungarian town Csongrád. Following schooling in Bonyhád and Baja, he enrolled as a university medical student in the city of Szeged, and received his medical diploma in 1951. He then joined the staff of the Department of Medical Chemistry of the Medical University in Szeged. Additionally, however, he continued his studies, and in 1955 he graduated in chemistry from the University of Szeged. From this time on, he served on the staff of the Department of Organic Chemistry of that university. Among his more memorable achievements were the organisation and commencement of teaching in biochemistry within the programme for the training of biologists, which began in 1964. He founded and directed the Biochemistry and Genetics Group at the University of Szeged, which subsequently became the Biological Isotope Laboratory.

In 1964, Béla Matkovics received the title of Candidate of Chemical Science from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in the same year he was awarded his university doctorate. In 1994, he was granted a Doctorate in Biological Sciences by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1995, he was appointed a full university professor. He retired in 1997.

His scientific activities initially involved the microbiological transformation of organic compounds. He then turned to the investigation of steroids, redox systems, oxidative transformations, and pathological changes caused by active oxygen radicals.

Besides his scientific and teaching work, he found time to play an active role in the Csongrád County Group of the



Association of Hungarian Chemists. He participated untiringly in the organisation of the series "Protein Chemistry Practicals" and "Szeged Course in Chromatography". Unfortunately, the 30th of the latter course, in January 1999, had to be held without him.

Rather than listing of his scientific achievements, his publications and his awards, stress should be laid here on the "paternal" care and selfless readiness to help which he constantly demonstrated towards his colleagues and students during so many years. The opportunity to learn to master a host of fundamental methods was ensured for a whole series of young researchers, all of whom were soon burrowing deeply into the literature. Independently of what topic he happened to be working on, he shared his research fields with many colleagues.

Professor Matkovics created a school in the field of research into free radicals in Hungary, with particular regard to oxidative stress and antioxidants. Virtually all of those currently carrying out research in this field in Hungary began on the basis of his instructions and guidance. The present writer considers herself highly privileged to have had the opportunity to have been among his students, and to have been his colleague for close to 30 years.

Sadly, at the height of his scientific powers, he was taken away from us extremely suddenly on October 13, 1998. However, as clearly revealed at the meeting held in his honour, his memory still lives on with tremendous and wide-ranging affection and respect.