

**In memoriam: Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski**

8.7.1930-30.5.2008

Jerzy Dymecki, Elżbieta Kida



Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski graduated from the Medical School in Gdansk in 1955. In 1958, after completing specialization in Pediatrics, she was employed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics of the Medical School in Gdansk. In 1960, she received a doctoral fellowship from the Department of Neuropathology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw directed by Professor Ewa Ossetowska and moved to Warsaw. In 1965, she defended her Ph.D. thesis on the morphology of perivascular glial membrane in cases with arteriosclerosis with and without hypertension and received her specialty in Neuropathology. At that time, she also worked as an Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the Warsaw Medical School and then as a Senior Researcher in the Department of Neuropathology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In 1965, she was a visiting scientist in the Department of Neuropathology of the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt.

The American part of her life began in 1967, when she came with two sons to New York to join her husband, Professor Henryk Wiśniewski, already an internationally recognized research scientist and a pioneer of modern studies on Alzheimer's disease. She started her career as a Fellow and then Acting Neuropathologist in the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, New York and St. Barnabas Hospital for Chronic Diseases, Bronx, New York. In 1971, she completed Residency Programs in Pediatrics in the Jewish Memorial and Montefiore Hospital, Bronx, New York. In 1974, she finished a Residency in Pediatric Neurology and in

1976 in Neuropathology in the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, New York.

In 1974 she moved with her husband to England, where she worked as an Attending Pediatric Neurologist and Neuropathologist in Newcastle General Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne. In 1976, upon returning to New York, she continued her professional career as an Associate Director of Clinical Services at the George Jervis Diagnostic and Research Clinic, Head of Pediatric Neuropathology Laboratory and Director of Ultrastructural Laboratory at the New York State Institute for Basic Research (IBR) in Developmental Disabilities, Staten Island, New York, directed by Professor Henryk Wiśniewski, and as a Professor of Child Neurology and Attending Child Neurologist at the State University of New York Health Science Center at Brooklyn. She also served as a New York Pediatric Neurology Consultant in St. Vincent's Hospital, Staten Island, New York.

The scope of scientific problems studied by Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski was broad. Her first publication, which appeared in *Polski Tygodnik Lekarski* in 1959 and referred to encephalomeningitis, was followed by over 300 scientific publications, 30 book chapters, and two books. Her research concentrated on essential clinical, pathological, pathogenic, and molecular biological aspects of normal and altered brain development, mental retardation, and selected neurogenetic diseases with a focus on the neuronal ceroid lipofuscinoses (Batten disease), fragile X syndrome, autism, and Down syndrome. The book

“Normal and pathologic development of the human brain and spinal cord”, which she co-authored with her long-time friend and collaborator, Professor Maria Dąmbaska, was very well received by the scientific community. Prominent among her accomplishments were her findings of abnormal neurogenesis and synaptogenesis in Down syndrome brain. In 1996, she received the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation’s award for her work in neurobiology.

Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski was not only an internationally recognized neuroscientist but also a devoted physician. She was always with her small patients, full of compassion and understanding. Her everlasting telephone conversations with the parents of affected children brought hope and provided badly needed support. She attended all meetings of the Batten Disease Support and Research Association to talk to the parents and their children, educate them and encourage them to further fight with this devastating disorder. She had the great privilege to participate as a Consulting Pediatric Neurologist in the development of the first causative therapies for children with Batten disease: stem cell and gene therapy.

She gave lectures as a visiting professor in many universities and actively participated in scientific meetings in over 100 countries worldwide.

She served as a reviewer in several study sections at the National Institute of Health, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and Mental Retardation Research Committee, and as a Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of Batten Disease Support and Research Association. She was an invited reviewer for many scientific journals and a member of the American Child Neurology Society, International Child Neurology Society, the American Association of Neuropathologists, the Polish Association of Neuropathologists, the American Academy of Neurology, the American Association on Mental Deficiency and the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children.

Professors Krystyna and Henryk Wiśniewski also contributed to preserve American cultural heritage. In 1978, they restored an old 1830s mansion, which later became a National Historic Landmark. This unusual house became the place of innumerable Polish-American gatherings and an asylum for many scientists from all over the world, always received with famous Polish hospitality.

Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski loved Poland and emphasized on every occasion with pride her Polish roots. Many researchers from Poland visited her laboratory, among them Maria Dąmbaska, Danuta Maślińska, Teresa Wierzba-Bobrowicz, Milena Laure-Kamionowska, Bogna Schmidt-Sidor, Wanda Gordon-Krajcer, Katarzyna Jarząbek, and Piotr Borsuk. Elżbieta Kida, Adam Golabek and Mariusz Waluś decided to stay there. In 1999, Krystyna and Henryk established the Wisniewski Neuroscience Foundation for young Polish neuropathologists.

Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski was a member and a generous sponsor of numerous Polish-American Societies, such as the Polish American Congress, the Kosciuszko Foundation, the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation, the Pilsudski Institute in New York, Polish American Museum, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, Polish Singers Alliance, Polish Children’s Foundation, Polish-American Organization of Brotherly Help, and Polish American Health Association. In 1995, she won the Polish Cultural Heritage Month Award from NYC Comptroller Allan G. Hevesi. She was elected the Staten Island Marshal of the Pulaski Day Parade in 1998 and the Grand Marshal of the Pulaski Day Parade in 2003.

She was very happy and proud to receive a presidential nomination of a Professor of Medicine in Poland in 2003.

Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski had a strong personality. She was tough on her co-workers but also tough on herself. She was tireless. She was courageous. She was always loyal to her family, friends and co-workers. She loved life and accepted it in spite of the many tragic moments it brought to her. She loved to be with people, and was always ready to advise and help. She was a dedicated protector of family values and was a wise mother for her two sons and a loving grandma for her five grandchildren.

Professor Krystyna E. Wiśniewski was diagnosed with cancer in 2001. In spite of repeated courses of radio- and chemotherapy, deep suffering and progressive weakness, she continued to work and attended numerous scientific meetings and social events. She never complained. She was brave to the end. We miss her.

