



IN MEMORIAM

Kurt G. Hofer
1939–2015

Kurt G. Hofer, a radiation biologist and preeminent educator, unexpectedly but peacefully passed away on September 20, 2015, at the age of 76.

Kurt was born in Feldkirchen in Kärnten, a town in the Austrian state of Carinthia, on March 2, 1939. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Vienna in 1965. In 1966, Kurt, accompanied by his wife Maria (Ridy) came to the United States to begin a postdoctoral fellowship at Tufts University Medical School. In 1970, he accepted a position as an Assistant Professor and worked as a radiation biologist in the Radiation Therapy Department at Ohio State University. A year later, Kurt moved to Tallahassee and joined the faculty of the Department of Biological Science at Florida State University, where he established himself as a Distinguished Professor and was eventually appointed as the Director of the University's Institute of Molecular Biophysics. He remained at Florida State until his retirement in 2003.

Kurt's research interests were diverse, but were often focused on the effects of nitroimidazoles on tumor cells, when combined with radiation and hyperthermia. However, one of Kurt's greatest impacts in the field of radiobiology came from his pioneering work on Auger emitters, particularly ^{125}I . Indeed, by characterizing the biological effects and toxicity of ^{125}I decay and elegantly describing the localized damage to radiosensitive targets in cells mediated by ^{125}I disintegration, Kurt firmly established a foundation for future Auger emitter research and its clinical utility. He also developed a novel *in vivo* cell survival assay, the ^{125}I -iododeoxyuridine-prelabeling assay. Kurt perfected this assay to tease out not only the extent of cell death, but also the modes and time courses of cell death; the technique was especially valuable for elucidating how adjuvants such as hyperthermia or various drugs modify the radiation response of tumor cells when combined in various sequences. Kurt and Ridy worked side-by-side in his laboratory, and Kurt often reflected that much of the credit for his lab's success was due to Ridy's efforts. In addition to his efforts in the laboratory, Kurt contributed to the discipline by serving on the Board of Directors for the American Cancer Society, as a member of National Cancer Institute Study Sections, and as the Coordinator of the International Research Program in Biophysics of Radionuclides for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Besides being an internationally renowned scientist, Kurt had at least two minor claims to fame. "The Sound of Music," one of the most commercially successful movies of all time, was filming on-location in the Austrian Alps in 1964, when Kurt was a university student in the area. Needing a little extra money, he jumped at the opportunity to play an extra in the film (he played one of the young German Wehrmacht soldiers that occupied Austria). Kurt was also interviewed for, and was prominently featured in Graham Farmelo's 2009 biography of the 1933 Nobel Prize winner in physics, Paul Dirac, entitled, "The Strangest Man: The Hidden Life of Paul Dirac, Mystic of the Atom." Dirac was a fellow faculty member of Kurt's at

Florida State, and lived in close proximity to the Hofers. Kurt and Ridy would visit Dirac on a weekly basis; early on in their friendship, Kurt helped Dirac diagnose a stomach ailment that plagued him and puzzled his physicians for nearly his whole life. The diagnosis helped to forge a special bond between Kurt and Dirac, who was known as a very private person. During one subsequent visit, Dirac surprisingly offered a rare glimpse of his childhood, which had been punctuated by frequent emotional abuse by his father. Such conversations provided keen insight into the outside forces that shaped Dirac's personality and represented a key element of Farmelo's biography.

That Kurt could relate to and befriend one of the greatest minds of the 20th Century was not surprising to anyone that knew him, as Kurt could relate to anyone! Kurt was a voracious reader and could carry on a conversation on virtually any subject. With his thick Austrian accent, he was a magnificent story-teller and excellent speaker. These talents helped Kurt to become an outstanding teacher. In fact, it was in the classroom, rather than the laboratory, that Kurt believed he probably had the greatest impact. Whether they were large introductory biology courses for non-majors or specialty courses in radiation biology for upper-level students, Kurt would fine-tune his lectures so that they were "digestible" by, and often entertaining for the target audience. Kurt's dedication to teaching won him several teaching awards, including the President's Teaching Award in 1980 and the University Distinguished Teaching Award in 1990. For his efforts in teaching, research and service, in 1994 he was named a Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor at Florida State University, the highest honor bestowed to a faculty member at the University. Kurt's enthusiasm for teaching extended to the training of undergraduate and graduate students in his laboratory. He was very supportive of his students, encouraged their creativity, and excelled at keeping them focused while allowing them to be appropriately independent. Several of his students that continued on in the radiation sciences and had successful careers as scientists or physicians attribute their success to Kurt. Kurt kept in touch with many of the students that passed through his lab and took great pride in their achievements.

Kurt did not slow down much, if at all, after retiring. In addition to spending time with Ridy and his two daughters (Andrea and Marlise) as well as his many friends, Kurt turned his attention toward gardening, swimming and maintained a keen interest in nature. He also embarked on a second career in real estate, and not surprisingly, he was very successful at it, developing several properties on Cape San Blas, located along the Florida Panhandle's Emerald Coast. However, Kurt leaves a lasting legacy in the many students whose careers he helped develop and the contributions they made or are yet to make.

Joseph R. Dynlacht
Linda Yasui
Martin Schneiderman
Ray Wartens
Xiao Lin
Nahid Mivechi
Nanette Van Loon