

IN MEMORIAM

Alexandra Poljakoff-Mayber**December 12, 1915 – January 13, 1999**

Alexandra Poljakoff-Mayber

Alex Poljakoff was born in Russia in 1915 and immigrated with her mother, to what was then Palestine, in 1924. After high school, she attended teacher seminars, leading to a diploma, which led in later years to her special interest in teaching. In 1939 she married Israel Mayber, and bore their son, Yoav, in 1940. In that same year, she graduated from the Hebrew University, majoring in botany for her MSc Degree. She joined the British Army in 1942, interrupting her advanced studies in the Department of Botany. After

the end of the Second World War, she resumed her studies and was reappointed as a teaching assistant in 1946. Again her studies were interrupted because of the Israel War of Liberation, when she served in the Israel defense forces, reaching the rank of major. When she left the army, she embarked on her PhD studies in earnest and was awarded her PhD in 1951. Her doctoral research concentrated on the biochemistry of germination in lettuce seeds, under the guidance of Professor Michael Evenari.

Throughout her scientific career, she continued to work on seed germination and published many papers in this area. Our first joint publication appeared in 1955, and in 1963 we wrote a text book on seed germination, which went through four editions – the last appearing in 1989. We were considering a new edition just a year before her death. Our close collaboration continued until the time of her death. Two publications on seed germination are in press, in the *Journal of Chemical Ecology* and in the *Proceedings of the 6th International Workshop on Seeds*. Her work on seed germination covered many aspects, such as metabolism, germination inhibitors, respiratory metabolism and more recently the relation between abscisic acid and dormancy in oat seeds.

Because of the problems of the utilisation of saline waters, she became interested and studied the mechanism by which salt inhibited the growth of plants, and this interest, in parallel with her work on seeds, continued throughout her scientific career. However, Alex (as everybody called her) had much wider interests. She was a devoted teacher and spent an enormous amount of time and effort preparing laboratory classes and lectures. She always paid particular attention to preparing her teaching assistants for their tasks. Her interests in teaching, her training as a secondary school teacher and her knowledge of what went on in the schools led her, together with other senior scientists, to push for the revision of the school curricula in the 1960's and eventually to the establishment of the Israel Science Teaching Center. This activity was recognized, a few months before her death, by a Doctor Honoris Causa from the Weizman Institute of Science.

All of these many interests resulted in her participating in numerous University and non-University committees, particularly those related to teaching, but also in other areas, for example the BARD (U.S.-Israel Binational Agricultural Research and Development Foundation). She served as Dean of Students at the Hebrew University from 1975 to 1979, an office for which she was exceptionally suited. Alex was always interested in people: she wished to help them, understand them and try to solve their problems. Quietly, firmly and without fuss or bother, she radiated an aura of compromise, of tact and of understanding which were perhaps the most central characteristics of her personality. She had a special gift, of being able to get on with people, to get them to co-operate and to repress strife and antagonism. Her interests were wide ranging, and she was able to bring critical thoughts to bear on unfamiliar problems. As she proceeded through the various steps of academic promotion, becoming full

professor in 1969, she was involved in almost every aspect of university life. She also was a member of the Council for Higher Education, which set guidelines for the running and standards of the universities in Israel. Another of her activities was to serve as Chair of the Academic Committee of the Israel Academy of Music.

There were few people who did not get on with Alex. She was loved by her many students, undergraduate and graduate. She maintained contact with and followed their progress and was always ready to help them, whether it was advice or letters of recommendation or just friendship. She will be missed by many of us as a friend, as a colleague and as a teacher.

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