



## Prof. dr. sc. Zoran Zgaga (1956–2011)

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One prestigious and rich life has ended. A book has closed of exceptionally prolific content, full of worthy and distinguished work. We have lost Zoran Zgaga, an eminent scientific mind, a respected university professor, a gentleman and above all a great man. And, as in the words of the great French writer, Andre Malraux »When oak trees are cut down, the forests resound«, the death of Professor Zgaga has shaken all those who lived and worked with him. He was an exceptionally moral figure, a man trusted by all,

a colleague we were proud to know. When we hear of the death of someone close to us and with whom we were happy to be with, it is hard at first to believe that it is true. After the initial shock, a hundred thoughts come to mind and we ask ourselves when we last had a talk. It was on the 19th of January, the day before the operation. We were drinking coffee and discussing what work could be done in the Laboratory and exchanging impressions of the New Year skiing holiday. He talked with great enthusiasm about how he had been on Kravavec with his younger son, Pietro, and how he was optimistic about the operation, after which he hoped to come back among us. I have never met a person who, in spite of serious illness, never complained or burdened others with his health problems. Whenever I think of my dear colleague and friend in the future I shall think of him sailing on heavenly seas and skiing down the slopes of heavenly mountains. Few people, like me, have been as fortunate to have by their side for most part of their working life, a colleague and friend, for whom they knew would always give them his honest opinion, with the aim of arriving at the best solution to any problem. We functioned in accordance with James Watson's well-known saying »that criticism is a reflection of the greatest friendship in science«. I first met Zoran as a student. I do not believe it necessary to present data from his CV, which can be found by anyone on the web pages of the University, Faculty, professional associations and the Academy of Technical Science of Croatia. Instead, I will talk about events which many of you have never had the opportunity to know.

Many years ago in 1979 when Dr. Marija Alačević, Professor Emeritus of our Faculty, organized the European Environmental Mutagen Society Meeting, Zoran, then a student, already participated with a study at the Congress. Like all of us he also participated in the organization of the Congress. Those were unforgettable days when we had the opportunity of taking part in the world of science, listening to eminent scientists, some of whom then very young, like Robin Holliday,

Miroslav Radman and Michael Resnik, whose studies were already cited in books and who we were enthralled by. Although Zoran's initial research was on bacterial systems associating with geneticists fungi became decisive for his further research, and the investigations of his group became known outside Croatia. He always strived for high quality research and was very critical, primarily towards himself and then his co-workers. He had immeasurable understanding for his students. In spite of his serious health problems he committed himself to the organization of international study in cooperation with the University in Orleans, and was delighted when the first students graduated there. Everything he did was unobtrusive, of high quality and he never broke his word. The projects proposed by him were always among the first 10 on the list. The students he was mentoring on degree or master papers and doctoral dissertations were rec-

ognized for the high quality of their work wherever they went. He was delighted when his co-worker, Dr. Anamarija Štafa, was given the position of postdoctoral fellowship at Columbia University.

Zoran was not a man who talked about his family, but he was happy whenever asked about his sons, Vinko and Pietro, and was proud of their achievements. Here we are, like one big sorrowful family, gathered together because Zoran brought us together. We have come to express our tribute and to say one big, sincere thank you. You left us Zoran when we least expected it. You went away when you were needed so much: by your loved ones, students of the Faculty, and your co-workers, conscious of the fact that you have left behind a life worthy of respect, a working life full of achievements but sadly one with many more empty pages. Thank you Zoran for having shared our lives.