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