



## MEMORIES OF ZOFIE

PRISCILLA MCKENNA

My dear friend Zofie, who died at 89 in March 2015, was the internationally known Zofia Kielan-Jaworowska, specialist in the collection, study, and classification of fossil mammals, particularly those of the Mesozoic periods. She was expert with dinosaurs, too, but mammals were her true love.

My husband, Malcolm McKenna, also deeply interested in the study of Mesozoic mammals, had for many years been studying the geology and paleontology of central Asia with the hope of someday going there to collect and research the fossil mammals of the Gobi region of Mongolia.

When, in 1960, Malcolm became Frick Curator of Fossil Mammals at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, he became the curator of the collections made in China and Mongolia during the Museum's Central Asiatic Expeditions conducted in the 1920s. Since 1923, the Mongolian Peoples' Republic had been under the control of the Soviet Union and had been held in isolation from all but the countries of the Soviet communist bloc. After joining the American Museum, in spite of the isolation, Malcolm managed to keep in sporadic touch by mail with his Mongolian counterpart, Demberlyn Dashzeveg.

Hope springs eternal, however, and Malcolm and I prepared for the remote possibility that field work in Mongolia might be resumed. We collected maps and studied Russian. We read books and talked to knowledgeable people, such as Owen Lattimore and Gombojav Hangin, the Mongolian patriot. And finally, in 1964, an opportunity opened to go to Mongolia as members of the second group of western tourists allowed into that country. It was a fortunate piece of timing, we thought, because the Polish Academy of Sciences/Mongolian Academy of Sciences were engaged in a major collecting expedition in the Gobi that summer; a very large expedition organized and led by Zofia Kielan-Jaworowska, whom Malcolm had met briefly in 1963.

Our group went to Mongolia and even into the Gobi, but no member of the Polish expedition was allowed to travel the 65 kilometers that separated us from them, and Dashzeveg was sent away somewhere out of our reach as long as we were in the country. A big disappointment on one front, but two good things happened. First, we both fell in love with Mongolia; and, subsequent to our trip, Malcolm and Zofie established a very close, lifelong working relationship, blessed by their shared and deep interest in the fossils of the Gobi, especially those of Mesozoic mammals.

Thus, I first heard of Zofie in 1964. At that time, it was a near impossibility for a major exploring expedition to be led by a woman—something that is commonplace now in the 21st Century. Naturally our interest in and desire to know her was aroused.

My first meeting with Zofie came when, during the subsequent winter, she traveled to New York to study the Museum's collections and to work with Malcolm on them, and she stayed with us in our home. I remember it vividly because, in her wish to bring us a gift, she had packed a bottle of Polish vodka into her suitcase, and, alas, it had leaked very generously throughout her case. So she and I spent our first hours together cleaning and deodorizing her wardrobe. After that, any formality between us that might have developed was totally gone, as it were, sent off on a flood of vodka.

Subsequently, during many sessions, we learned details of her organization of that successful Mongolian expedition and developed a deep admiration of her abilities, both as a leader and as a scientist. And, many years later, in the 1990s, when I was organizing the equipment and supplies for the American Museum/Mongolian Academy Expedition to the same areas of the Gobi, I copied some of her successful methods and thereby developed a deep understanding of and respect for what her organizational endeavor involved,



Fig. 1. “The outstanding Zofie:” Kielan-Jaworowska and colleagues, 1974. Photo taken by Malcolm C. McKenna at a congress in Moscow, 6–12 June, 1974. Participants, left to right: Altangerel Perle (Mongolian Peoples’ Republic), Vyacheslav Chikhvadze (Russia), Nina Shevyreva (Russia), Zofia Kielan-Jaworowska (Poland), Konstantin Flerov (Russia), Ivan Pidoplichko (Russia), Boris Trofimov (Russia), ?, Valerii Reshetov (Russia), and Demberlyn Dashzeveg (Mongolian Peoples’ Republic).

though I had no scientific leadership responsibilities as she did. The organizational skill and political adroitness that she demonstrated then were critical to the success of that whole effort.

In 1966, Malcolm and I, with our two oldest children, Douglas and Katharine, stayed with Zofie in her home in Warsaw. There we met her husband, Zbigniew Jaworowski (Zbyszek) who was not only her best friend and companion, but also the love of her life, and their son, Mariusz, close to the same age as our two. We were entertained very warmly there and also had the enormously impressive experience of watching the construction of a sea-going yacht that Zbyszek was building in his back garden. From there, Zofie took us on a tour of northern Poland where we visited a forest preserve, formerly the hunting preserve of the King, where some European bison (wisent) breeding was taking place, and an Ice-age, human-occupied cave was being excavated by Professor Solecki of Columbia University. Some years later (1976), Zofie and Zbyszek sent Mariusz to spend the summer with us, in order for him to learn American-style English. We had a lot of fun taking him fossil hunting in the Rocky Mountains and river running on the Green River of Utah. Later that summer, he spent the better part of a week memorizing the contents of a book of “Polish Jokes” in American English that he found on our bookshelf.

Over the years Zofie’s paths and ours crossed frequently, except for a relatively short period of political turmoil in Poland, when she requested that we not contact her. She and Malcolm worked together in the USA, in Poland, and in Norway; and they exchanged ideas elsewhere (Fig. 1). We learned much about her life experiences, during and after World War II as well as in the Gobi, and we came to be very fond of her and to have great appreciation of her talents. When she came to New York, she always stayed with us, and sometimes she would take time off from scientific research and she and I would do some female things like buying new clothes. Zofie was a beautiful woman who always dressed stylishly. One time I helped her buy a rabbit fur coat and matching hat at Bloomingdale’s. That winter, she had an accident driving a Volkswagen Beetle, and she always claimed that the thick fur coat saved her life. Now, as I sit at my desk typing these memories of her, I am being watched by the small brass Buddha that she brought me from Mongolia.

When I think of the experiences of Zofie's life — of her impressive lifetime accomplishments and of the obstacles that she had to overcome in order to achieve those accomplishments, not only during the Nazi occupation<sup>1</sup> but in the following years of totalitarian government in Poland — I find myself without words to adequately express my admiration and respect.

In her teens, she pursued her education in Warsaw, risking the death penalty to study at the clandestine high school and university (an uncle of Zbyszek's was an organizer of the network of clandestine schools); she participated fully in the Resistance; (she ran around on the streets of Warsaw working as a medic with a paleontology textbook in her backpack; just in case there was a little extra time in which to pursue her scientific study!). She spoke to me movingly of the elation felt by the Resistance fighters when the Russian Army approached Warsaw, thinking that Poland was about to be rid of the oppressive Nazi occupiers, and of the Resistance fighters' profound and tragic disillusionment when the Red Army camped on the other side of the River and stayed there, hoping that the Nazis and the Resistance would kill each other off and make things easier for the new conquerors.

In the wake of World War II, using her amazing linguistic talents (Polish, Russian, English, French, Norwegian, etc.), Zofie, along with others, including Malcolm McKenna, pursued cooperative research programs with colleagues from Mongolia to California and at many points in between, thus leading the way to the post-war establishment of vertebrate paleontology and related Earth sciences as world-wide, collaborative scientific endeavors. And during the Cold War, she defiantly refused to collaborate with the attempts of the authoritarian eastern bloc governments to keep their people isolated from the West.

Inspired by her deep love of her scientific work, Zofie demanded the best from herself and usually from her co-workers. I have always felt that, given the way her expectations were honed in the most challenging possible environment (i.e., education under threat of death!), she felt that she had to make the best use of her talents and her time, and sometimes that was hard for her co-workers to adjust to. However that may be, it was surely the basis of her very high level of productivity.

With her strong and enduring courage, unquenchable spirit, brilliant and talented mind, boundless energy and perseverance, personal and scientific integrity, warm personality, and her passion for her scientific work, she set an example for all of us. My friendship with Zofie has been one of the great privileges of my life.

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## REFERENCE

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Priscilla McKenna [PrisMcK@indra.com], 1000 Jasmine Circle, Boulder, Colorado 80304, USA.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief description, in Zofie's own words, of her experiences under the "Teutonic barbarism" (her words) of the Nazi occupation, refer to Chapter 4, p. 35, of her book "In Pursuit of Early Mammals (Kielan-Jaworowska 2013).