Outstanding Geneticist and more than just a Wife

Elena Aleksandrovna Timoféeff-Ressovsky

[ 21 June 1898 - 29 April 1973 ]

1908 Born in Moscow on June 21. (according to the Julian calendar, June 8); among many siblings she grows up in a sheltered environment and receives an excellent school education.

1927 Studies of biology and zoology in Moscow, where she meets and marries Nikolaj Timoféeff-Ressovsky in 1922.

1923 Birth of son Dimitrij (1945).

1925 Following an invitation, the Timoféeff-Ressovskys travel to Berlin with their son to do research on genetics in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Brain Research (KWf). The working conditions in the KWf are advantageous for female scientists. Cécile Vogt worked at this institute as a department head. In addition, Elena Timoféeff-Ressovsky, Estera Tenenbaum, Stella Rose, Rosa Schragenheim, Imgrund Leux and Gertrud Soeken were among the female scientists who worked at this institute.

1933 Elena is officially removed from her assistant position due to the pressure of the Nazis against so-called „double earners”. However, she continues working in the laboratory of her husband.

1937 The Department for Experimental Genetics is independent and linked to the KWf only spatially. Marguerite Vogt works on her dissertation in the department of Timoféeff-Ressovsky and receives her doctorate in 1937.

1943 Son Dimitrij is arrested because of activities against the Nazis.

1945 Dimitrij is killed in the concentration camp Mauthausen. In autumn of the same year, Elena’s husband is arrested by the Russian NKWD ("The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs") in Berlin-Buch and taken to Moscow to the infamous prison Lubjanka, then sentenced to imprisonment and interned in a camp in Kazakhstan. Another department of the NKWD, which seeks his assistance and active cooperation in atomic research, finds him a year later. He is released from the camp and committed to collaborating on the Soviet atomic bomb project.

1946/1947 Elena works as assistant at the Zoological Institute in the department of Hans Nachtsheim at the University of Berlin.

1947 Elena Timoféeff-Ressovsky and her son Andrej travel to the Urals, where — in the meantime — Nikolaj is collaborating on the Soviet atomic bomb project. The couple works together in the project in Sungul focusing on research into radiation damage.

1955 The Timoféeff-Ressovskys are permitted to travel and publish scientific materials once again but only within the USSR.

1955 - 1964 Together with her husband, Elena works in the Department of Radiobiology and Biophysics at the Institute for Biology Sverdlovsk (Academy of Sciences in the USSR). Here, Elena works on her thesis for the State Doctorate (habilitation).

1964 - 1973 Retiree (Konsultant) in the laboratory in the Department of Radiobiology and Genetics at the Institute for Medical Radiology in Obninsk near Moscow. The lab is led by N. Timoféeff-Ressovsky.

1973 Elena dies on April 29.