

Sent via email, September 7, 2022

Dear all,

I am in Prague at my computer while you are gathering and enjoying the meeting and seeing each other in Brussels. Unfortunately, it seems that I will never be able again to attend the ESHS activities, the Commission's meetings or any other meeting, but I am and will be with you in spirit. [ ... ] I am writing to react with a few words to the wonderful anniversary of the Commission [...]. So here are a few snapshots of my years connected with the Commission.

### 1) Bucharest 1981 and after.

As far as I remember, I attended the founding meeting in Bucharest. At that time I wasn't involved in the history of women in science, but the topic caught my attention. In the following years I was not too useful to the Commission. In Czechoslovakia, as in other Communist bloc countries, the gender issues were highly unpopular, partly sort of taboo, partly mocked, but in Bucharest I was impressed by Margaret R[ossiter] and met for the first time Erika Hickel, the brilliant German historian of biochemistry and pharmacy who made me think of the problems of women in science and sent me some books which opened a new territory for me. Erika and her husband became our lifelong close friends and I am mentioning her here because she seems to me unjustly forgotten. I must bring up other friends from whom I learned a lot, namely Evelyn Fox Keller and her wonderful books like that of Barbara McClintock, and Brigitte Hoppe who generously supported after 1989 cooperation in the history of science with the colleagues from the former Communist bloc. Thanks to the invitation Éva Vámos I participated then in the conference in Veszprém (Hungary) in 1983 and after that followed on the Hamburg (1989), Sopron-Vienna (1992) and Zaragoza (1993) meetings, where I made many friendships that have continued until today.

### 3) Mexico City 2001 and after.

The Mexico City IUHPS/DHST congress offered me the opportunity to get involved more closely with the Commission. I vaguely remember the resentment caused by the elections to the Council without any woman candidate and the protests of Margaret [Rossiter], Joan Mason and other members which had very little response. Joan Mason and Evelyn Fox Keller were later great inspiration to me and motivated me to write the biography of Marjorie Stephenson. At the Congress, Joan and Margaret suggested organizing the future Commission's conference in Prague which happened in June 2003 under the title "Women Scholars and Institutions" and became a great success. I cannot value highly enough the cooperation in the symposium preparation with Ida Stamhuis, Annette Vogt and Maria Rentetzi (memorable special

session on women in radioactivity research). We became friends throughout the upcoming years, as well as with Felicitas Seebacher whom I first met in Mexico City. One of the opening speeches held the outstanding Czech biochemist Helena Illnerová, the first woman elected for President of the Czech Academy of Sciences, while quite typically for the Czech scientific community of the time, the invited Rectors of the Prague Charles University and the Technical University excused themselves. The only shadow of the conference was the absence of Joan Mason who had unexpectedly died shortly before.

In the following years I divided my attention between the Commission, the ESHS and the Working Party on History of Chemistry; but luckily enough I could often cooperate with and meet on these occasions the same people, so that it was like seeing an ever growing big family you always enjoy being with. I witnessed the natural turn of the new generation, let me mention just (I hate to leave out somebody) Don Opitz, Annette Lykkness and of course the tireless Milada Sekyrková who also deserves gratitude for organizing a number of successful meetings. Among them stands out the ESHS Conference 2016 in Prague where several sessions were devoted to the problems of gender and science, and it was a special joy to see there as a guest of honour Margaret Rossiter, still full of energy, at the symposium on the Marie Curie Effect, the term coined by Margaret herself. In the meantime the Commission suffered a great loss. In 2015 prematurely died Éva Vámos, one of our most active members.

The 26th International Congress for History of Science was to take place in Prague in 2021 and I was naturally very much looking forward to it. Its organization undertook Milada Sekyrková with her typical enthusiasm, but then due to the covid era the congress took place online. It was for me a new experience as well as the symposium "Women and academic careers in Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War" held in my honor. A great privilege I value immensely.

I am not going to tire you more with my "memories of an old warrior" just want to say how great those forty years were, how much I appreciated being with you and learning from you, and what a joy is for me to see that even in these complicated and not very favorable times our field strives and attracts young people. I would like to congratulate all of you with this anniversary and say with Maria Rentetzi that "To me the Commission has always been my support group, an inspiration". Thank you all for that and wish you in the upcoming years no covid, no wars, just enjoyable meetings, much fun and stimulating books and papers.

With many warm regards,  
Sona Strbanova