

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY¹

MARIAN KUC

I, Marian Piotr Kuc, signed under this document by his own hand, the son of Józef Kuc and Maria from Trauczyńscy family, was born on 26th March 1932 in Chrzanów (at the time Province of Krakow).

MY SOCIAL AND FAMILY STATUS

My origin is a typical bourgeois one, it lies in a category of people who are indigent but financially independent. My oldest ancestor, whom I know



Fig. 1. Marian Kuc as a pupil in 1940s.

only through documents, in the late 20's of the 19th century worked for the town of Chrzanów. My father was a low-level administrative employee in a Magistrates Court in Chrzanów, Kraków and

Krzeszowice. For several years, starting in 1919, he did his military service in the Polish army, fighting in the front combat lines in the army of General Haller. He also participated in the World War II. He was a political prisoner in a Soviet concentration camp in Konstantinowka in the Ukraine ('Oblast' Donbas). My mother devoted herself completely to the family, to running the household, to bringing up children, diligently guarding the Roman Catholic moral principles. I am a brother to two older sisters, Kazimiera (who died in 1980) and Józefa. Currently I'm 169 cm tall and I weight 98 kg. I did not suffer from any infectious diseases (not taking into consideration e.g. flu, runny nose etc.) and did not undergo any major bodily surgeries. I was not convicted in court. I am a bachelor and have never married. I do not have any maintenance charges. I am a citizen of Poland and Canada.

MY CHILDHOOD UNTIL THE AGE OF EIGHT

I do not have anything special to say about this joyful period of my life. I was a healthy, lively child, constantly being reprimanded for visiting the neighbourhood. I observed animals and plants with interest, upon which my grandfather commented: 'My grandson will be a gardener'. Apparently I had a very good memory and even now I remember quite a lot of events from when I was three years old. My personality in that period was being formed by my parents, especially my father².

¹ Fragments of 'Biography – a shortened, not translated into foreign languages version intended for institutions and individuals in Poland' translated from Polish.

² Seeing his son's interest in natural science, my father bought me Arct's 'Illustrated Atlas of Medical Plants' when I was five years old. My father was a herbalist, he read to me plants' descriptions, explained species' features and most importantly we collected herbs together. I still wasn't able to read, but I already was mentioning some of their Latin names e.g. *Viola tricolor*, *Plantago*, *Thymus*, when I was chatting with my peers, which amazed us people who were observing us.

PRIMARY EDUCATION FROM 1940 TILL 1946

I started my primary school in 1940 in Krzeszowice and I finished the sixth form in Chrzanów in 1945/1946. The period of the German occupation was very harsh for our family. Apart from the misery of life, each day difficult efforts had had to be made in order to survive, which reflected very negatively on my elementary education. To overcome the numerous deficiencies in my primary education required special effort and persistence during the years 1945 and 1946. At this point I will mention the priceless value of additional lessons during the years 1943–45, given by senior scouts from the Grey Ranks and patriotic teachers. On the certificates from the primary school, the results for Natural Science and Physical Education were my best ones.



Fig. 2. Marian Kuc training gymnastics in the Chrzanów Branch of the ‘Sokół’ Society in 1947.



Fig. 3. Marian Kuc resting during field work in the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland in 1953.

SECONDARY EDUCATION FROM 1946 TILL 1951

I finished four secondary and two high school classes as a student of the Stanisław Staszic Secondary School and High School in Chrzanów. During my high school years I had access to literature in the fields of natural science, geography and geology (publications of: Książkiewicz, Raciborski, Rastofiński, Siedlecki, Szafer, Zaręczny and others). I was diligently observing rocks, soils, plants, animals and field forms in the region of Chrzanów which eventually convinced me that I should investigate mosses (Bryophyta), because of their interesting connections to the climate and post-Ice-Age landscape changes in Poland. I began to determine them according to the Dr. Bronisław Szafran’s key, not expecting that soon I would become his academic student. The fact that I had managed to repair the gaps in my education caused by the German occupation allowed me to complete my studies and to also practise sports, especially apparatus gymnastics, and to participate in trips to historic places and sightseeing excursions which greatly extended my connections with scientists, experts of diverse cognitive fields and with passionate amateurs.

HIGHER EDUCATION FROM 1951 UNTIL 1956

In 1951, with some difficulties, I was accepted at the Jagiellonian University, in the Faculty of Bi-

ology and Earth Sciences in Kraków, without the right to live in a dormitory or to receive a scholarship. At this point, carrying a thick herbarium of bryophytes I went to Dr. Szafran asking him to hear me out. The professor was very surprised by my visit, but it also interested him. He asked for many details, as he knew Chrzanów extremely well. While I was quoting Latin names for the mosses that I had collected, people sitting nearby were nodding their heads with embarrassment. Dr. Szafran admonished them not to disturb us and decided that as soon as he was able to get a desk, chair and a bookshelf for me, I could come to his laboratory. I spent all my time studying. It was noticed that I was eating badly and that I was living in conditions that could have been hardly called liveable. Once, professor Władysław Szafer (ex-Rector of the Jagiellonian University, the Head of the Institute of Botany of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków, ex-Head of the Jagiellonian University Botanical Garden and the Head of the Institute of Nature Conservation) came to the laboratory to say what people had told him about me. He talked to me for a long time and asked what I was planning to study. I replied quite impudently: 'I'll be a botanist'. To the question of how many złoty was my monthly income, I responded with no embarrassment: 'very little; late into the evenings, until midnight, I do the washing up in the



Fig. 4. Marian Kuc on an excursion with a colleague of his university class in the Bieszczady Zachodnie mountains. From left: Marian Kuc, Stanisław Grabski, Krystyna Chronowska (Grodzińska), and Barbara Morawska (Nowak), 1954 (courtesy of Krystyna Grodzińska).



Fig. 5. Marian Kuc with his sister Józefa Kuc in the Botanical Garden of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, 1956.

restaurant called 'Horse's' (only horse meat was served there) by the Sienna street'. The professor gave me 75 złoty per month from his own money and intervened at the Deanery of the University for the positive consideration of my scholarship request, which soon was accepted. A new period of my life began.

The classes of the Faculty of Biology were time consuming, varied and incorporated a so-called 'discipline of work'. On some days they amounted up to 10 hours and the everyday Kraków–Chrzanów travel time was taking me three hours (I was stowing away, because I didn't have money for the tickets). I was studying the literature and notes on trains or in railway common rooms, while waiting for transport. Nonetheless, in this overloaded timetable I was trying to find four hours a week to devote to general and regional geology studies at the Jagiellonian University's Chair of Geology, which professor Marian Książkiewicz personally allowed me to do; he was also a researcher of



Fig. 6. Marian Kuc (right), Prof. Władysław Szafer (middle) and Władysław Wojewoda (left) doing field work in the surrounding of Alwernia near Chrzanów in 1954.

my hometown area, which he liked to recall in my company.

I investigated bryophytes with a special interest in the Uplands of Southern Poland, from Bug to Odra rivers. My first independent scientific articles appeared in print in 1955. I published the synthesis of the research from this area in a work entitled 'Mosses of the Silesian Upland', printed in 1956 while I was still a student. I finished the university studies with obtaining a master's degree in 1956. At that time, to my misfortune, there existed a strict official prohibition of authorising permissions for a permanent residence in the city of Kraków, which caused me to remain homeless for a few years.

Professor Szafer saw how negatively that homelessness reflected on my efforts and gave me a permission to reside in the annex of the historical house in the Botanical Garden, where the Szafers lived as well. It was a round-shaped annex, four steps by three steps, with historical stained-glass, a wardrobe, a complete lack of plumbing and electricity, and no key to the front door (and

it was said that there was a monk buried in the wall of this room). Currently it is substantially rebuilt, and is connected directly to the museum of dendrology. The opportunity to live there was a great favour to me. I lived there for several years. The professor took the risk of the lack of registration upon himself. I knew that his wife, professor Janina Jentys-Szaferowa, agreed with my staying there for which I have been grateful ever since. After all, without it I couldn't have worked.

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT FROM 1956 TILL 1966

Immediately after my university studies I became an employee of the Institute of Botany of the Polish Academy of Science in Kraków and I got a two-year Ph.D. scholarship. From 1 April 1960 I worked as a senior assistant and in 1961 I was appointed an assistant professor. During this period I was very intensively researching the Highlands of Central Poland and I published many works for the planned taxonomic, phytogeographical,

and bio-paleohistorical monograph of this huge region. That work, entitled: 'Biogeography of the Southern Poland Uplands', was published in 1964 as a shortened version (due to editorial reasons) and was one of the parameters of my doctorate that I achieved on 22 June 1960.

In 1958 I became a member of a Polish Expedition to Spitsbergen, which was functioning as a part of the III International Geophysical Year based on the workstation on the North Coast of Hornsund (Norway). The investigation of the polar tundra vegetation was a great joy for me, especially its components that only grew in Poland as relics of the Ice Age. I devoted several publications to this matter. Unfortunately, during those years the geobotanical literature of our institute's library were very incomplete, and the comparative resources of herbarium holdings were particularly sparse, and without these reference materials the elaboration of the Hornsund materials was impossible. The Institute offered me the opportunity to study them



Fig. 7. Marian Kuc at a hut during field work on Spitsbergen, 1958.



Fig. 8. Krzysztof Birkenmajer crossing the glacier on skies on Spitsbergen, 1958 (photo J. Pruchnicki).

either in Stockholm, in the Dr. Herman Persson's laboratory (we had been corresponding since 1955) for a period of only one month (because Sweden belonged to the so called 'dollar zone') or in the Institute of Botany of the USSR Academy of Sciences under the direction of the renowned bryologist Dr. Lydia I. Savicz-Lyubitskaya, for a period of one year with the possibility of extending my stay. Without hesitation I chose the second option and studied in that Institute during years 1959 and 1960, researching all Polish polar collections, not just the Hornsund ones.

When I came back to Kraków, I prepared the Spitsbergen manuscripts for printing (in general, so far, I have published 30 Spitsbergen works). The Hornsund collective work appeared in print in 1963. It was from this point, after numerous scientific successes, for unknown reasons, people who were once close and supportive began to demonstrate unpleasant and unjustified expressions of

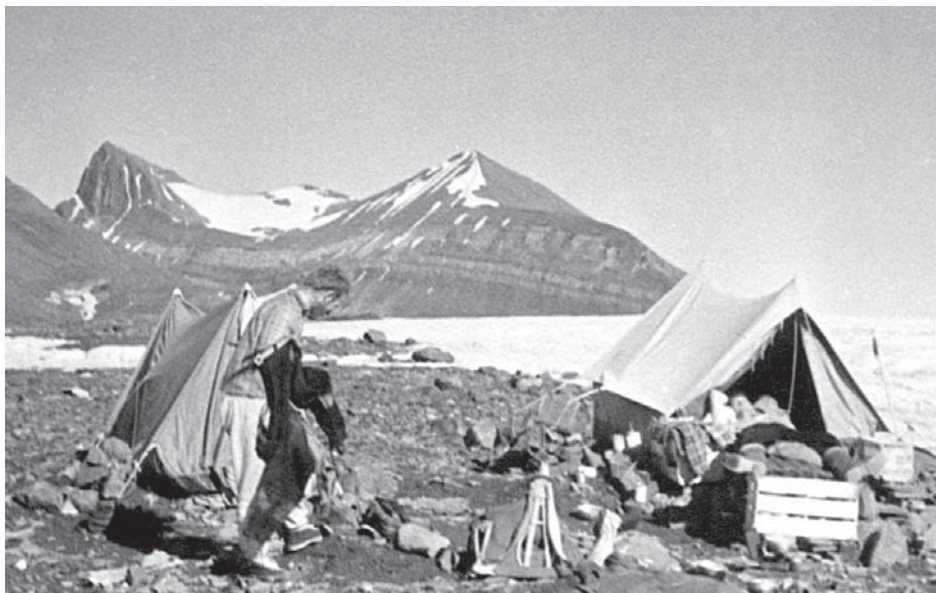


Fig. 9. Marian Kuc in camp during field work on Spitsbergen, 1958.

jealousy, denigration and hypocrisy. These were particularly evident when, after long years of homelessness, I obtained permission for residence in Kraków (a one-room flat, 47 sq m) and won

a Wartburg car in a random draw on the main square of Kraków. The interrelations within the Institute were becoming more and more unpleasant and sometimes they were just unbearable. My



Fig. 10. In boat on waters of Hornsund. Professor Stanisław Siedlecki (first from right), Marian Kuc (third from right), 1958.

supervisors and others who were familiar with my situation, encouraged me to persevere, saying that ‘... it’ll surely change’.

I decided to start my habilitation degree in those difficult conditions. According to the governmental regulations of the Polish Academy of Sciences, if I hadn’t started that habilitation degree, I could have lost my job, because four years had passed since my doctoral degree. I realized that starting these studies would intensify the attacks from hateful people towards me. Regardless of the circumstances in 1963 I asked Prof. Szafran to be the supervisor of the habilitation procedure, which my Master accepted with joy and congratulations. Not long after that I was summoned by my austerest enemy, a Jagiellonin University scientific worker, and he stated that he would not allow my habilitation. He did not give his reasons. In order to protect myself from expected attacks I was going to start my post-doctoral studies not in Kraków but in Lublin, and was accepted professor Józef Motyka, the Head of the Faculty of Botany of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. As a result I was summoned for an interview with the new head of the Institute of Botany of the Polish Academy of Sciences professor Bogumił Pawłowski who knew me from my first years at the university and from numerous common trips. I didn’t feel embarrassed to state my views. The professor decided that ‘it is not advisable that as



Fig. 11. Time to leave Spitsbergen – Marian Kuc carrying his ‘treasures’ collected during the expedition, 1958.

a graduate of the Jagiellonian University I do my habilitation somewhere outside it’. It was a trap. I informed Prof. Szafran straight away. About two



Fig. 12. Marian Kuc after returning from the expedition to Spitsbergen, 1958.



Fig. 13. Marian Kuc lecturing in the Institute of Botany, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków (right – Professor Zdzisław Czepe), 1959.

months later, the professor informed me that he could be my supervisor, and advised me to cancel my post-doctoral studies in Jagiellonian University

which I, of course, didn't do, keeping in mind the warning. At this time I had just applied for a scholarship to the National Research Council



Fig. 14. Marian Kuc and Sergey Sergeevich on Ladoga Lake in Russia, 1961.

(NRC) in Ottawa (Canada) for conducting research in Canadian polar regions; according to the plan: bryophytes, taxonomy, biogeography, ecology, palaeobotany. In 1965 I was informed that my application was accepted by the NRC/Canada authorities. According to regulations I had to inform the head of the Institute of Botany PAS/Krakow and I applied for a passport for a scientific trip to Canada. I didn't receive any response from the Passport Office in Warszawa. Eventually, I received permission to have a talk regarding this matter in the 2nd Department of PAS in Warszawa where I was told that my situation at that time wasn't the responsibility of that office and that it was not a rule that an academic scholarship had to be received by the person to whom it was awarded. I informed the National Research Council/Ottawa about this development and I asked for a delay. I decided to move to Canada for good. After almost a year of waiting for the Passport Office's reply I began preparations to leave Poland through the so-called 'green border' in Yugoslavia/Trieste. I didn't hide this intention from the Institute of Botany workers. While I was in Yugoslavia I received a letter from my dear friend Tadeusz Tacik (addressed to Prof. Max Warber in Ljubljana) which said that there were two letters waiting for me to pick up in my laboratory: a scholarship with my flight ticket and a passport to Canada. I immediately went to Kraków and started to prepare my suitcases. I left on 19 November 1966.

CANADA – FROM 1966 TO THE PRESENT

I travelled by train from Montreal to Ottawa on 30 November 1966. Two elegant NCR employees were waiting for me at the station. After completing preliminary formalities they handed me two cheques (the first one was a month's salary, the other one was a loan for buying a car), altogether \$1200 (I had never seen more than \$20 in my life) and they took me to the National Museum of Canada, the Department of Botany whose Chief was Dr. Alf Erling Porsild, a famous researcher of polar Canada. For the last couple of years we had been corresponding. It was an honour for me, and I was happy. The work conditions were humble,



Fig. 15. Marian Kuc on the summit of Pico Espejo (4756 m a.s.l.) in the Andes of Venezuela, 1976.

but the library and the herbarium of comparative materials were huge. I felt as if I was in my most desired element. I wasn't restricted by anybody. I was working non-stop, on some week days for 16 hours. Dr. Porsild sometimes warned, 'let's hope you won't get sick'.

In February 1967 Prof. Fritz Müller (a Swiss, geographer/glaciologist, a lecturer of the McGill University in Montreal, high-class researcher whom I knew only from numerous publications) invited me to participate in his 'McGill University Expedition to Axel Heiberg', with a workstation on Colour Lake. I accepted this offer with gratitude and enthusiasm. I presented an overview of my research plan, said where the research results would be published, how helpful I could be as far as the maintenance of the workstation was concerned (mainly as a cook), etc. The professor appreciated my commitments and handed me several kilograms of literature about the Expedition and the area of its activity. We shook hands cordially, fraternally. There were five permanent members of

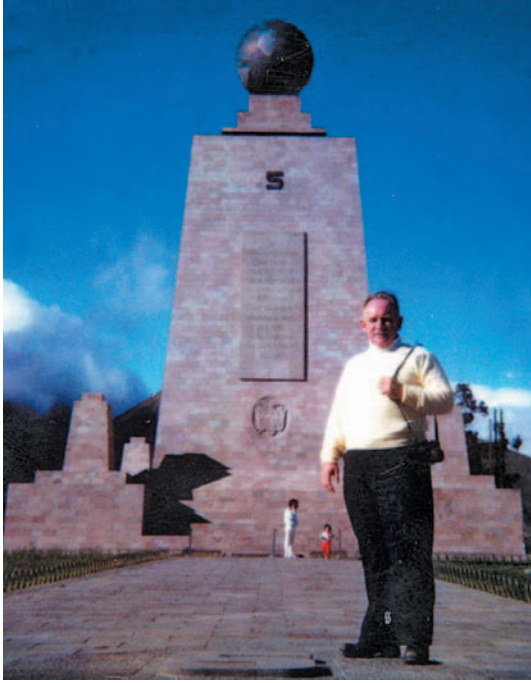


Fig. 16. Marian Kuc at the central monument showing the equator in Ecuador in the 1980s.

the Expedition: two Canadians, a Swiss, a Japanese and me. A huge plane (a Hercules) took us from Montreal to Resolute Bay, located in the High Canadian Arctic. From there we flew on a small plane further to the North to the station in Expedition Fiord. Professor Müller came to visit us there as well as many other people. Around mid August when the ground was completely frozen and was covered with a permanent winter snow, we finished the expedition. My collective work about this research appeared in print, in a book format, in 1973 and other articles were published in 1969 (two works), 1970 (four works), 1971 (three works), 1972 (two works), 1973 (six works), 1974 (three works), 1993, 1996, 1997 (three works), 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 30 publications altogether.

In January 1968 I applied to the immigration authorities in Ottawa for permanent residency in Canada and I received a ‘Landed Canadian Immigrant’ status, valid for five years, or until I received Canadian citizenship, that I obtained in 1973.

NRC extended my post-doctoral scholarship until the 27 November 1968 and covered the expenses of my research in the Canadian High Arctic,



Fig. 17. Marian Kuc as a cook in his house in Canada, 1983.



Fig. 18. Marian Kuc with Masai people in the Serengeti National Park during his expedition to Africa in 1984–1985.

where I went at the beginning of that year's summer, intensively working in the West and South part of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, mainly on Banks I., Prince Patrick I., Fitzwilliam Owen I., Melville I., and Meighen I. While working on glacial deposit stratigraphy near the workstation at Mould Bay (Prince Patrick I.), I met Dr. John G. Fyles, the head of the Terrain Sciences Division of the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) in Ottawa, who asked me where I was going to work after finishing my NRC scholarship. He promised to hire me, and at the end of 1968 I began my work as an employee of the GSC.

In 1969 I built my own house in Ottawa, a so-called 'split level', which I rented out from 1 January 1970 until the mortgaged was paid off. I very much desired that my homelessness and related issues would come to an end. In the following years I purchased some building plots as a security investment.

I worked in the Geological Survey of Canada until 1976/1977, achieving significant research results which I was publishing in Canada and Europe. During this period I spent almost every summer carrying out studies in the Arctic. The institute was a 'temple' of science and its workers were



Fig. 19. Marian Kuc at the termite mound in the Serengeti National Park during his expedition to Africa in 1984–1985.



Fig. 20. Marian Kuc (right) with the chief Fredrikson in Quasiarsuk, South Greenland, 2000.

gentlemen. I could talk a lot about it. I left the GSC on my own request being aware of the fact that my salary, even though relatively high, was not going to provide me a high enough pension, because I came to Canada when I was already 38 years old. My financial advisor calculated that it was the right time to start building up my pension. It wasn't easy at all. Professor Fabius LeBlanc, a botanist at the Ottawa University, also a bryologist, on seeing my struggle with finding a job, hired me as his assistant in 1976/1977 until I was able to register my own construction company 'Uplands Enterprises' in 1979 and then a company 'Joe and Mario Construction Limited' (Joe was Guisepppe Martinello, a hard-working mason who after some unfortunate bankruptcies, appreciated my services as a 'pass-me-the-lime' helper, and also as the company's manager and contract negotiator). This company was dissolved on 23 August 1982.

After six years of managing my own business my financial situation let me come back to science. I closed my construction companies and registered a very small laboratory named 'Overland Research Laboratory Inc.' of which I was the director from April 1991 until April 1996. At this point I got rid



Fig. 21. Marian Kuc keeps the portrait of Józef Piłsudski during a meeting of the Polish diaspora in Ottawa in the 2000s.



Fig. 22. One of the last portraits of Marian Kuc taken in 2011.

of the building plots and retired, being 65 years old. Since 1977 my savings were able to cover almost my entire annual bryological research in Africa, Central and South America and on the Islands of the Pacific Ocean, collecting from interesting moss

specimens which I continue to work on. In 2000 I participated in my last excursions, to Iceland, Greenland and to that part of Antarctica which is ice-free during the summer months. At this point I finished my as yet unpublished project entitled 'From Arctic to Antarctica'. I started planning this project in 1954 and gradually realized it over the years according to my capacities.

After closing Overland Research Laboratory Inc., I continued bryological research studies privately character in a mini-laboratory in my own house.

Propria manu,

Marian KUC

Post scriptum. The form and style of the above autobiography significantly differ from the standards of autobiography writing for office purposes, because it's based on passages from my diary and it's purpose is to answer numerous questions of my friends who want to get to know the facts closer.

