

OBITUARY

WILHELMINA GERHARDINA WELMAN (1944–2019)

Wilhelmina Gerhardina Welman, generally known as Mienkie, was born in Bloemfontein, Free State, on the 21st of October 1944. She matriculated in 1961 First Class with a distinction in German from the Sentrale Hoërskool, Bloemfontein. She enrolled at the University of the Orange Free State in 1962 where she completed her B.Sc. with major subjects Botany and Psychology in 1964 and B.Sc. Hons. (Botany) in 1965 supported by a CSIR Bursary. She continued her studies and in 1967 she received her M.Sc. (Cum Laude) (Botany) for her thesis 'Die morfologie van die spore van Suid-Afrikaanse Pteridophyta' which she completed under Prof. E.M. van Zinderen-Bakker, also supported by a CSIR Bursary.

She started her career as a Technical Assistant at the Palynological Research Unit of the Botany Department, UFS, lead by Prof. E.M. van Zinderen Bakker where she worked during 1967 and 1968. In 1969 she was appointed as a technician at the Dairy Section of the Glen Agricultural College where she taught Microbiology to Diploma Students. In 1970 she was appointed as a plant taxonomist in the National Herbarium, at the then Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria, where she worked until her retirement in 2009 but continued her work until her sudden death in January 2019 after a short illness.

When Mienkie started working in the National Herbarium, it was still located at Vredehuis, in the southwestern corner on the grounds of the Union Buildings. At that time they worked on Saturday mornings as well! She went through the BIG move to the new Herbarium Building, situated in the Pretoria National Botanical Garden. The new herbarium building was officially opened in 1973. She was in charge of Wing D (Codd Wing) housing the families Convolvulaceae to Asteraceae as well as the cultivated collection. Mienkie was for long periods the only scientist in the wing and was responsible for incoming identifications, physical and scientific curation of the collection as well as all queries and visitors to the wing. The first time I met Mienkie was when I was a botany honours student at the University of Pretoria. I brought some specimens in to be identified for the project I was working on at that stage. After more staff were appointed in the herbarium and Wing D, she concentrated on her research in the families Convolvulaceae, Cucurbitaceae and Solanaceae. She was the author or co-author of 99 scientific, semi-scientific and other general articles.

Not only was Mienkie responsible for the smooth running of her wing, but she was also active in institute related projects and other activities with a botanical connection, always prepared to help when asked. She was Acting Curator of the National Herbarium from January 1991 to June 1992. At some stage she was sent to the Natal Herbarium where she spent three months helping out when there was a shortage of scientific staff. She was the South African Contributor for *Excerpta Botanica* from 1980 to 1988 and Secretary of the Southern African Herbarium Curators Working Group for 1992, 1993 and 1994. Mienkie was involved in the Garden Festivals presented annually by the Institute during the years 1992 to 1998. With other Pretoria staff members, she was a referee for the Compton Prize between 2003 to 2006 and 2008. She was an active member of the South African Association of Botanists (SAAB) and attended quarterly meetings and outings of the Northern Transvaal Branch regularly as well as the annual congresses nationally. She served as the secretary of the Northern Transvaal Branch during 1976 and 1977, as a committee member of the Northern Transvaal Branch in 1980 as well as Secretary of the Council in 1978, 1981 and

1982. She was the Assistant Editor of *Forum Botanicum* (the newsletter of SAAB) from July 1974 till December 1982 and Editor from January 1985 to April 1990. Mienkie served as a member of the organising committee for the AETFAT International Congress held in Pretoria in January 1982. She attended the congresses of the S2A3 (before SAAB was established) and the Vth International Solanaceae Conference in July 2000 at the University of Nijmegen, Netherlands, where she presented a poster.

She was a member of the Dendrological Society and joined in on their weekend outings to various localities. She served as a member of the Central Committee from 1981 to 1986, and again from 1995 to 2003 as well as a member of the Editorial Committee from 1981 to 1986, 1989 to 1991 and from 1997 to 2003 for the *Tree Atlas*. She was a life long member of the Botanical Society of South Africa.

Mienkie stayed in Arcadia, Pretoria, and as she did not own a motor vehicle, she had to use public transport to commute to the Institute on a daily basis, in rain, wind, sunshine, summer heat and winter cold. She was one of the most dedicated persons working at the Institute who hardly ever took sick leave and as little as possible vacation leave. She was always well groomed and one of only a very few female employees that has never worn slacks to work, and always wore silk stockings. She travelled a few times abroad in her personal capacity to broaden her horizons. In her spare time she loved reading, going to the movies and the theatre. She was also actively involved in her church and community. Her church had a group for single persons called "Aksie 1" of which she was a dedicated member and also a member of the management structure. She worked at the church fêtes every year and helped at the polling station during political elections. The last few years she served as a member on the Body Corporate of her housing complex. Mienkie was a dedicated blood donor and, again, as she had no private transport, it took a special effort from her. After the child of one of our colleagues was diagnosed with leukemia, volunteers were asked to donate platelets, which Mienkie, without hesitation, immediately did.

I remembered Mienkie with her white lab. coat, always with a pencil and piece of paper in one pocket to dot down every identification, visitor and telephone enquiry, for the statistics on her monthly, quarterly and annual reports. She always had a small tin container with peppermints in the other pocket, from which she regularly slipped one into her mouth. Her work bay was always neat and tidy and everything filed in properly marked files, her books neatly and orderly stored on her shelves. If anybody needed a quick ID spot, information on any institute or other botanical related issues, the reply was usually: "Ask Mienkie". She was a mentor to many an upcoming young scientist, technician and assistant. I knew she could read and understand German, but she was more generally known by her colleagues for her knowledge of French and was often called on to do French translations of articles. She had a very beautiful, neat handwriting. It seems as if nothing could upset her. She was always cool and calm. Her friendly face, sharp and inquisitive mind and helpful nature will be missed by all. One new species was named in honour of her: *Nolletia welmaniae* P.P.J.Herman. She is survived by her sister and two nephews.

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